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ABSTRACT

Early childhood development is increasingly viewed as an affirmation of children's rights. This report describes the concept of early childhood development and presents several viewpoints regarding early childhood care and development, parenting, and approaches to early education. The report also presents 10 case studies of programs to enhance the development of young children and their families throughout the world. Part 1 of the report examines early childhood development as providing the foundation for later learning, and discusses several topics such as: the state of current research about the learning process; caregivers' role in supporting children's learning; linking current research to practice; identifying effective models for early childhood development in various cultures; and national attitudes toward early childhood development and improving learning conditions for young children. This section also suggests ways to enhance public policy in early childhood development. Part 2 presents the following papers regarding early childhood care and development: (1) "Parents as Care-givers, Teachers and Learners: Examples from Asia" (de los Angeles-Bautista); (2) "Early Childhood Care and Development: Where We Stand and the Challenges We Face" (Evans); (3) "Value Outcomes in Early Childhood Development" (Weikart); (4) "Approaches of Early Childhood Education" (Arango); (5) "The Whole (All) Must Grow Through Learning" (Hesse); and (6) "From Centre-Based Pre-School to Integrated Child and Family Educational Programming" (Bennett). Part 3 of the report presents case studies describing early education programs, parent education programs, and research initiatives in Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, South Africa, Ireland, China, India, Mali, and Arab countries. (KB)

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FOR ALL
Making it work
CHANGE IN ACTION

L'IMAGINATION AU POUVOIR

EDUCATION PARA TODOS
Haciéndola realidad
MANOS A LA OBRA

Early Childhood Development:
Laying the Foundations of Learning

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Early Childhood Development: ***Laying the Foundations of Learning***

The portfolio was conceived, written and edited by Benedict Faccini and Bernard Combes.
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Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but they are not from you
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you,
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth...

Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931), *The Prophet, 'On Children'*

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Concept

"It is a wise father that knows his own child."
W. Shakespeare (1564-1616), *The Merchant of Venice*

"Today,
We are guilty of so many errors and many faults
But our worst crime is abandoning the children,
Neglecting the fountain of life.
Many things we need can wait; the child cannot.
Right now is the time.
His bones are being formed,
His blood being made,
And his senses are being developed.
To him, we cannot say, tomorrow. His name is today."
Gabriela Mistral, *Chile*

Early Childhood Development:
LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF LEARNING

In the past, much of Early Childhood Development (ECD) focused on two functions: either preparing children for entry into primary school or unburdening families from the duties of child-care during the working day. These two functions dictated a large part of ECD policy and its pedagogical approaches. Yet there is a third direction in ECD which has long been ignored and which is now increasingly being stressed as the very basis and heart of ECD — the child's total well-being and development both emotionally and intellectually. This third direction is proving its relevance in today's world of turmoil, conflict and constant change. For, as research is showing over and over again, early childhood development and care can pave the way for a life of learning, autonomy and discovery. ECD is also referred to as Early Childhood Care and Development or ECCD to further specify the notions of growth and development but, whether termed ECD or ECCD, the process is one of the realization of every child's right to survival, protection, care and optimal development from conception onwards.

The human child is defenceless and unprepared for the outside world for a very long time — the longest of any known species. Early childhood is a period of risk and danger but also of immense opportunity. It is the time to explore, experiment and master change. It is the crucial period when children come to develop positive attitudes towards learning and a desire to participate in the world.

It is around the basic aspect of learning that the present portfolio is built and argued. It will attempt to answer some of the following: how are the foundations of learning laid in a child's mind, not just as a means to succeed in school but as a way to develop the ability to cope with the complexity of the world? How concretely do children see how to solve problems and gain a desire for continual learning throughout life? What distinct events or conditions mean that learning is sparked off in a child? What is the current state of research? What are the different approaches? What can be done to strengthen ECD throughout the world?

Why Early Childhood Development?

Arguments in favour of Early Childhood Development are as varied as they are numerous. They range from the economic argument of greater productivity and the ethical argument of the right to live and develop potential to the fullest, through to the social argument of greater equality between classes and sexes, to the scientific argument of greater intelligence and more balanced social behaviour, and to the political argument of greater participation in society. Each argument has its own debate but all require a sustained holistic ECD intervention. Today's children have much higher chances of surviving, but the gains being made in child survival and health are not being matched by adapted programmes or policies. The need for suitable ECD programmes is strong.

The wealth of current experiences provides an effective choice of models and the hope of results at relatively low-cost in terms of human resources and infrastructure. We now know enough about ECD to realize that early interventions make sense: in terms of each individual's growth, particularly in their attitudes towards learning, as a means to make other development programmes more effective and as a way to provide entry-points for change. We also know that deficits cumulate and that opportunities lost during the valuable period from birth to the age of eight are opportunities lost in later life. What can be done then, to support children in early childhood, improve the way they learn and what they learn? Maybe early childhood development needs to shed the last remnants of its image as a privilege for the middle classes or a security net for working parents. It is time for ECD to be viewed as a true and real necessity for the viable future of the next generations. Indeed, many of the world's hopes for overcoming conflict, environmental degradation, illiteracy, poverty and inequality could well remain vain unless we invest adequately in the early development of children, giving them a proper start in life, a fair start to be able to learn and discover for themselves.

The state of current research about the learning process

Child development and growth are complementary but they are not the same. Growth is characterized by progress in size, height or weight, etc. Development is a process of change in which the baby learns to master increasingly complex levels of movement, thinking, feeling and socialization. Development is a journey of discovery through the senses, in which the child takes in and thereby creates, establishes and confirms connections and paths in the brain. The dimensions of this development process are all related one to the other, the emotional affecting the cognitive and the physical and vice versa. It is a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional process involving aspects of health, nutrition, hygiene, emotion and intellect. Its complexity calls for an integrated systemic approach to ECD with "integrated programming" that overcomes artificial barriers between health, nutrition, learning, etc.

By the time children reach the age of two, their brains contain as many synapses and use up as much energy as the brain of the average adult. The complexity

of development is described by scientists as a magical "dance", and it lies at the very heart of every human being and his or her learning process, beginning at birth and even before, in utero. The implications of this on society, and the way children are taught, are enormous and necessarily mean that the importance of the first few years of life is increasingly being stressed by educationists. Scientists are discovering that experiences after birth rather than innate elements are actually responsible for wiring the brain together. Brain development before the age of one, researchers say, is, in fact, much more rapid and extensive than was previously imagined. For example, the amount of connections between nerve cells in an infant's brain grow more than 20-fold in the first months of life. Cell formation might be practically complete before a child is born but the actual maturation of the brain continues after birth. Over the course of childhood, the synapses in the brain proliferate, rewire and are cut away and this whole process is governed by experience.

It is evident that it is within the crucial first early years, when experience is moulding the brain, that the foundations of learning are also set. A person's ability to learn and his or her attitudes towards learning stem from their early years. A stimulating and receptive context can set a young child on the path of discovery, openness to the outside world and the capacity to integrate information. The brain is never as elastic again as it is in childhood, in terms of receptivity and vulnerability. Adults are capable of assimilating new knowledge but can never rival the child's brain in its mastering of new skills and its discovery of learning. Early childhood experiences are the building blocks of this development and the child is architect of his or her own brain, piecing together the puzzle and reacting to the outside world. It is the sensory experiences of the child which play on the brain, creating and setting out a functioning mind. Unfortunately, experience is not necessarily limited to positive events. It can come in many and varied forms. It can mean intense joy and interaction in a mother's arms but also sickness, malnutrition or neglect. The type of experience, then, is decisive in mapping out the attitude towards learning that will develop in the child.

Studies over time have shown that children properly fed and living in a healthy environment with active playmates have measurably better functioning brains at the age of 12 than children brought up in less stimulating environments. It can be said that environment not only accounts for the number of connections but also the way these connections actually operate or are wired. Early stress can influence brain function, learning, and memory negatively and permanently. Studies of chronic stress in children have shown that development of the limbic system, frontal lobes and hippocampus is hampered when stress occurs, leaving these parts of the brain, used for attention focusing, vigilance and memory, particularly vulnerable. But stress does not have to be chronic to have a detrimental effect. Less extreme forms of emotional stress, such as arguing amongst parents or parental depression can also lead to children being at greater risk from depression and learning difficulties. A child deprived of experience and use of the senses will undoubtedly suffer. Researchers have proved that children who don't play a lot or who are rarely cuddled and touched by parents or care-givers develop smaller brains. On the one hand, a wealth of experience can produce a powerful brain and, on the other, traumatic experience can lead to a greater risk of a variety of later cognitive, behavioural and emotional difficulties.

Developing positive attitudes and willingness to learn

One of the basic motors for learning is curiosity and babies and young children are extremely inquisitive. If their thirst for knowledge is not satisfied, it will shrink away. The simple example of the baby's visual system speaks for itself: unless a baby's eyes are stimulated, exercised and constantly used they will not develop to their full capacity. So it is with the brain and, by extension, the learning process.

If a child's environment is conducive to discovery, new emotions and communication, then the process of learning is naturally enhanced. There are key stages in this development, as one new discovery leads to another, and the willingness to learn is fed by the power of an experience and a hunger for more. If one is to try and identify what it is in the development process that stimulates learning then it is important to have a vision of how children learn. Toddlers, for example, are not ready to assimilate abstract signs such as letters or numbers but learn through concrete, tangible ways such as discovering or touching an object. Learning methods should build on these natural desires and processes. A child, for example, will naturally pile up bits of wood and then separate them but will not spontaneously enjoy reciting the alphabet or counting objects.

One of the guiding principles of holistic childhood development is that it is the unfolding and progress of learning that is important rather than the product. That means that it is the approach to, and process of, learning that stimulates a willingness to learn rather than the simple ingesting of facts and figures. Pushing children to absorb facts and knowledge will not increase their desire to learn. It will, in fact, be to the detriment of the child's later development and ability to learn effectively from the facts of life. Learning by doing and the very basic need to know seem to be the main motors in stimulating children.

Children have a natural need and desire to experiment and will do so independently of adults. Leaving children to discover for themselves is one of the best ways to open up their minds to the joys of learning and knowledge. Just simply reaching for an object helps the child's brain develop hand-eye co-ordination. Without encouragement by parents or care-givers, children will want to experiment, will naturally learn through their mistakes, interact with other children and come to understand conflict, sharing and how to deal with feelings. Play, for instance, stimulates imagination and creativity and helps children work out the adult world with its contradictions and rules. As said before, the complexity of the development process and the discovery in the child of the pleasures of learning call for a total or integrated approach to ECD. What happens at one moment or age of development influences the next and so on, so forth, both positively and negatively. This process might begin with awareness, move to discovery, exploration, testing, inquiry and finally use. The cycle can be observed in the simple movements of the body which allow the child to understand cause and effect and then allow him/her to move on to more complex ideas through mastering the body. Here, it is important to mention children with special needs. Research shows that ECD intervention can mean greater stimulation for children with special needs and give parents space to reflect and create better support to overcome their difficulties. ECD provides a perfect

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entry point for acting with children with difficulties. It is the period in children's lives when care-givers and parents have the greatest possibilities to channel energy into the individual needs of the child and when the emphasis on the all-round holistic development of the child can be the most effective in surmounting learning difficulties. Intervention at an early age is also a chance for many families to become more involved in developing their child's potential by reaching a better comprehension of their role in helping to realize it.

Once the ball of learning is rolling, the child's discovery of life will flourish if the environment is responsive and supportive without being imposing. Language skills will graft onto previous skills through interactions with adults. Children will become aware of themselves within a wider social environment, coming to display emotion and understanding its effect on the community or family. Child development is, therefore, multi-faceted, physical, emotional, mental, social and, even, spiritual with an in-built domino effect, in which change creates change. The skills that are at the foundation of knowledge construction are reinforced and improved through practice. It is the child who constructs his or her own knowledge.

What is the role of parents or care-givers in supporting the development of learning in children?

Every child is born with an immense potential to grow and develop but this potential can go in any direction either negative and positive. Potential can be supported and blossom or be neglected, wither and rot. The choice is, basically, up to parents or care-givers. Conditions and expectations of parents, however, are changing rapidly. The hands-on training that many parents used to receive from the extended family or from the community with its cultural traditions is largely unavailable to contemporary parents. For this reason, in many countries, particularly in the North, parents are more hesitant about employing their instincts and tend to have more faith in professional care-givers and programmes. Child-rearing, contrary to popular belief, is not necessarily an innate skill; education and advice can be necessary. In countries of the South, where traditional knowledge is at play, parents still need advice, particularly in the area of nutrition, even if their own know-how is beneficial to their children. What can be done to make sure parents support their children's learning effectively? What is the delicate balance between intervention and objective support?

It has been said that the typical care-giver should be the natural care-giver. Why impose or replace parents by professional educators when parents have or could have the knowledge and are the child's first stimulators? It should, perhaps, be more a case of providing extra information and integrating existing knowledge patterns, particularly regarding health and nutrition. Peer-to-peer exchange, for example, is an important means of transmitting knowledge in many communities, with mothers swapping ideas and methods with other women. Whatever approach parents adopt in their community or home, it is essential that they display love, inspire and protect their children. This, coupled with adequate nutrition, contact and learning opportunities creates an appropriate

learning environment where children can explore, experiment and come to their own conclusions about the world.

Parents are the child's first educators, companions and playmates. Children need to interact with them and their adult peers to take on the structure of the community world around them, and to observe behaviour. It is this interaction that is fundamental to the effectiveness of learning. Support to disadvantaged parents in this respect is particularly valid in enhancing a young child's learning as it is strongly believed that attachment to a caring adult is a pre-requisite for balanced development. Parents with a degree of basic education are more likely to provide the appropriate needs for the correct growth and development of their child, knowing how to make up for nutrition deficiencies, protecting against common diseases and stimulating their child's senses.

An adult who is receptive to progress in a child provides a solid and safe base from which children can set out to explore the wider world. Parental care is the key in the creation of this "enabling environment". Care can be generally described as accepting, loving and stimulating the child. In practical terms it is what adults and other care-givers in the child's life are able to provide: a respect for the child's development with supportive and affectionate interaction. Care is the integrated set of actions that ensure for children the synergy of health, protection, nutrition, psycho-social and cognitive aspects of development.

Some measure of predictability in the adult environment is necessary to support the child adequately. Swings in adult receptiveness can offset the child and deter him or her from the path of learning which relies so much on parental support. Indeed, in support programmes to parents, much of the emphasis is on the mother for the reason that strengthening the role of women, who are generally the most in contact with children, leads to an improvement in conditions for the child too. Research has shown that enhancing the mother's own capacities in herself can, in turn, lead to stimulation and support of the child's mental development and pave the way for success in later learning. A typical support programme for a mother, which takes into account the dual responsibilities of productive work and child-care, might combine nutritional advice such as how to obtain and cook high-energy diets for children and then advice on how to play with or stimulate the child. Mothers can, for example, be encouraged to use their capabilities to spur emotional responsiveness in the child through face-to-face contact with the baby or child. It requires considerable work to set up learning situations in which each child can progress at his or her pace and it isn't realistic to expect parents or even child-care staff to be able to do this without some form of adapted training. It is obvious that a child's well-being is inseparable from the state of the family, which may include a mother, father, sister or brother, and siblings or those who fulfill the care-giving role. Today, the role of fathers is also being particularly highlighted. Fathers often claim that they do not understand young children or their needs but, increasingly, programmes are realizing the benefits that can come from breaking down father's insecurities and traditional stances. Good and effective care and responsibility from a father at an early age can only increase the support a child feels and increase stimulation. The growing work burden faced by women also means that men's contributions are extremely important.

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Not all parents, especially young and inexperienced ones, are sensitive to their toddlers' needs. It is important that they are made to be aware of the different stages of a child's development and the appropriate responses at each stage of growth. Receptiveness in parents is a key factor in a child's learning process. If parents can correctly perceive and interpret children's signals, and respond appropriately, then the child will develop in confidence. Baumwell et al, (1997) discovered that a mother's sensitivity towards a nine-month-old child was a more accurate way of predicting what language abilities at thirteen months would be like than the actual state of language comprehension at nine months. The most effective adults are those who refuse to stereotype their children, believe in their freedom to learn and do all they can to avoid inequality between their different children. Parents should be able to see a child's increasing needs and assist in creating progress. Domestic events such as washing, cooking or cleaning can be used to introduce children to the use of objects and a sense of the environment. Daily occurrences can become exploratory activities, moments to play and find out new things. Learning materials are all around. There is no need for sophisticated toys. Not all parents realize, for example, that the very basis of learning is the act of exploring and discovering on one's own. The role of parents or care-givers is to comprehend the natural process of learning which the child is undergoing and to work with it, not against it.

As said previously, researchers have shown that a child's attachment and affection for his or her parents or care-givers enhances the ability to learn and take on new knowledge and cope with stress and conflict. Certainly, studies show conclusively that abuse of children can lead to adult aggression and the inability to maintain attention. Bad child-care and neglect can be truly detrimental to a child's growth. To give some idea of the effect of parents on their child's learning process, one can quote the discovery made by psychologists working at Stanford University in the United States of America. They found that children bond with their parents and discover language through them by being talked to in the friendly high-pitched squeaky language that parents, the world over, use when addressing their children. Far from being an amusing whim of doting parents, this baby language has been discovered to increase the child's heartbeat and speed up the process of linking objects to words and vice versa. Children thus spoken to develop language skills and new words considerably faster than other children left to themselves. Parents also play an essential role in establishing the neural circuitry that allows a child to regulate his or her reaction to stress. If parents are constantly stressed, arguing and raising their voices, children will develop brains attuned to danger. With any stressful event, their heartbeats will increase rapidly and their hormone levels rise. If parents are not always in tune with their child's emotions, a feeling of frustration will grow and turn to a sentiment of rejection. Empathy with the child's feelings is needed. Positive emotions can be wiped out of the child's mind if they are never encouraged, nurtured or shared. When one places negative emotions and experiences within the context of learning one can quickly see what a disastrous effect they can have on later life.

Given the fact that experience is the main motor for the construction of the brain, the simplest parental actions can have an effect on the growing child's brain. Breast-feeding, for instance, combines many aspects of child-caring and shows

the holistic approach that should be sought in child development. On the one hand, breast milk is the most nutritious and hygienic substance for babies and easily digestible (it is enough to note that for the first four to six months infants don't really need other foods). On the other hand, it brings into play many of the forces necessary for the development of the child's learning process: eye-to-eye contact, listening to the mother, bodily contact, observation, etc.

It should be remembered that it is not only parents who look after and nurture small children. In many countries, the extended family and outside care-givers also play a crucial role in the absence of parents. Beyond the attachment to parents or a single care-giver, support in the wider community also helps the child discover and accept society's patterns and rules and see the importance of strong and healthy social relations. All types of care-givers can stimulate and observe children's development. All are responsible for paving the way for learning in a child's mind. But whether it is a care-giver or a parent, and whether it is in Africa, Asia or Europe, there seem to be strong universal values for parents that lead to the development of learning in their children. These might be summed up as:

- display positive feelings towards your children, show them that you love and care for them;
- adapt and put yourself in your children's place, follow and try to understand their thinking and experience of the world as compared to yours;
- talk to your children about their concerns and stimulate conversation through emotion, gesture and speech;
- give praise often, to nurture confidence in the child;
- help the child focus attention so that parent and child share similar emotions;
- expand and give explanations about what you are experiencing of the outside world together;
- assist the child in setting boundaries and parameters for the world, and guide, positively regulate and suggest alternatives through mutual planning;
- follow, respond and give meaning to the child's initiatives;
- always establish a sense of dialogue whether verbal or not;
- assist the child in enriching his or her experience through comparison and story-telling.

How can we implement or support what research is telling us today? How to link research to practice?

Throughout the world today, much of educational practice still remains outdated. Scientific advances have changed the way people eat and work but the way we learn, especially as young children, has remained largely unchanged, often

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founded on concepts of another era of now-obsolete aims. This means that what research is telling us and what is currently being done are, often, two different things. It is not, however, a case of dropping everything and chasing after the latest research findings. Much research has already been integrated into ECD programmes worldwide and traditional practices can at times employ methods that are presently being promoted as good child-care practice by researchers.

Part of the battle to implement research is, of course, to continue to convince policy-makers and governments that early childhood intervention is beneficial, even necessary; and this with positive data from studies and the clear results of programmes. Research findings have already helped in this respect and have won government backing in the fields of nutrition and health. More needs to be done in terms of enhancing children's learning. The kinds of targeted campaigns that led to an awareness worldwide of the importance of child nutrition now need to be held in the fields of child-care, education and development.

Research into child learning has taken longer to be absorbed than other areas such as nutrition but, as more and more data come out of universities and institutes as to the vital importance of creating a learning environment, governments and policy-makers cannot but listen. As mentioned previously, in the past, there has been a tendency to minimize ECD to pre-primary readiness or limiting it to occupying children while parents go out to work. The complexity of learning and development, as revealed by research, has begun to change this attitude. It is now a question of urgency that certain key aspects of research be filtered down into practice, particularly for ECD workers.

Applying research to practice has always met with a series of obstacles: research trapped in ivory tower concerns, researchers interested in specific study cases and not necessarily in subjects, lack of funding, the realities of the field, etc. Overcoming these barriers, therefore, has to be one of the main thrusts of ECD strategy today. One of the reasons for research remaining divorced from the basic realities is that little synergy exists between researchers, governments and child-care workers. In the case of early childhood programmes, much research information, that has been carefully worked out and developed over years, unfortunately remains on the shelf. It is felt by policy-makers that researchers only study and observe cases and do not come up with concrete solutions and arguments for problem resolution. This may be due to the fact that it is generally only university staff who carry out research and not actually the communities or the ECD workers. It may also be due to the fact that academics don't necessarily see the need to link their work to the demands of the field, communication seemingly limited in both directions.

There are, however, concrete ways of linking research to practice. Dialogue and implementation of research might be achieved by a variety of means: brokering of a third party, for example, through the work of a lobby or a policy institute, the creation of pilot projects that stimulate and influence ECD workers, informing the general public through books, baby guides and parent self-help books and last but by no means least the internet. Television and radio broadcasts on the importance of ECD might also be used. Research results can also be directly endorsed by governments and made public. It might often necessitate translating

or reducing jargon, citizens demanding greater knowledge, and parents and ECD workers voicing their opinions directly with researchers. Such a participatory approach, bringing together all parties such as teachers, parents, supervisors, child-carers and policy-makers, is possible and has already shown its strength particularly in the case of exchange sessions or study periods in which institutes of research welcome colleagues from the field and vice versa.

Elaborating specific policies to spread the results of research would also help. The following are some basic strategies that might be adopted:

- knowledge of research into child-care and development should be made readily available to ECD workers in the field, NGOs, policy-makers and the general public. This should include strategies for wide-spread dissemination of documents and use of the media. Conventions and agreements on children's rights should be made widely-known;
- channels of communication and exchange programmes should be developed or opened up to ensure that researchers and ECD practicioners understand each other's needs and realities. Practioners need to be involved in research;
- an inter-disciplinary and multi-dimensional view of child research, children's rights and well-being should be developed keeping in mind a holistic understanding of children;
- development and research capacity in countries that do not have the appropriate research institutions at national level should be strengthened;
- experts, subjects and institutions, able to carry out studies on targeted child concerns, should be identified, and projects in priority areas facilitated and set up.

What kind of ECD models for encouraging learning should be developed?

It is clear that there is no single effective ECD model that can be followed blindly to satisfy all environments. It is also obvious that some traditional approaches to child-rearing have always employed methods that are only now being promoted by educationists and specialists as the right way to work. Integrating and preserving these precious traditional practices will be a challenge for the future. How, for instance, by researching what they comprise, can we preserve such valuable methods as infant massaging in India, stories of the oral tradition in West Africa, postpartum rest for women in many Muslim countries, etc? If countries of the South are only ever presented with one Western model and told to change their habits, extremely valid age-old practices risk being swept aside.

Comparing ECD in countries of the North and South certainly proves that a blending of the traditional and the modern is necessary and that every approach, if grounded in the obvious interests of the children, has a valid side. For example,

studies have shown that African children brought up in the traditional African way on their mothers' backs, develop physical abilities faster in their first year than European children of the same age brought up in cots. In the same way children who, from an early age, are given duties such as fetching and measuring water from the well become independent quicker with greater problem-solving capacities than children of the same age who, constantly catered for by their parents, show great linguistic development but little sense of responsibility. Rather than trying to identify a single model, it would appear important to promote a variety of models, knowing that different models are needed not just for distinct countries but also for distinct communities who have their own cultures and values. In the same way, it appears clear that blending traditional approaches with modern practice is a possible way forward in generalizing ECD. Criteria from one community or country should not be used as references for another.

Despite cultural variations, there is a strong degree of common understanding between early childhood care-givers and specialists around the world, mainly because there are universal values and specific stages that appear vital in the development of early childhood programmes. Obviously, culture and customs affect and even sometimes direct topics, methods and skills - but there is a certain universality in ECD, particularly in respect to learning.

Children brought up in a wide variety of different ways can all end up being receptive to learning. What is known, though, is what seems to be beneficial and what is clearly detrimental to a child's healthy development. The universal pre-requisites for the development of learning might be summed up as: protection from physical danger, shelter, adequate nutrition, adequate health-care, attachment to an adult, motor and sensory stimulation, appropriation of vocabulary, stimulating language and thinking skills, developing independence, learning self-control, learning co-operation by helping and sharing, expanding skills by talking, reading and singing, and developing questioning and observation skills.

Every age in the young child has an appropriate learning response: whether it be learning through physical, verbal and emotional exploration and experimentation between the ages of one and three, or experimenting with pre-writing skills after the age of three, simple problem-solving between the ages of three and six and, for example, developing numeracy and literacy between six and eight. This should not suggest that children from illiterate or deprived backgrounds are doomed to fail in their own form of learning. Learning can take on many forms that go beyond reading and writing. What seems important, generally, is to encourage a wide variety of learning which can be both intellectual and physical.

What is clear from the variety of approaches, whether they be traditional ways or western pedagogical schools of thinking, is that there is no one model for replication. Rather, there is a general need to recognize and integrate culturally-specific ways of child-rearing (unless, of course, they are against the obvious interests of the child) and respect the child's need for stimulation and care.

What attitudes should countries, particularly in the South, adopt towards ECD and the improvement of learning conditions for young children?

There is no one single development model or programme that can solve the many complex and deep-rooted problems relating to poverty, but ECD programmes throughout the developing world have proved that intervention at an early age can soften some of the side-effects of poverty and exclusion. It has also been shown that ECD is a suitable entry-point for larger development programmes, even in times of emergency. ECD may, in fact, be one of the few opportunities many children, in some of the poorest countries of the South, have to break away from the cycle of deprivation and school failure. Intervention at a later age in children's development is not as effective in terms of cost and learning and the risks are far greater. Relatively deprived countries can afford ECD programmes. At a lesser cost than other education systems, it can reduce drop-out, improve learning ability, prepare local communities and families for education, create income-generation schemes, innovate in pedagogy, raise awareness and all this with little cost in terms of buildings or infrastructure. Using the media, for example, to raise awareness or mobilizing community and NGO support is not expensive. ECD for many poor families is a basis to begin addressing their needs and in some cases can provide development activities and basic education programmes for adults, particularly women.

Programme planners, in the past, have had a tendency to impose "alien" concepts on countries of the South in ECD projects. It appears increasingly vital, today, to investigate and build on what already exists. For centuries, early child-care has been woven into the fabric of many traditional societies and communities. The idea of "educating" or handing over the development of children to experts remains a Western concept and, more often than not, actually devalues local culture, to the point where some people in the South believe that what they are doing is wrong and has no value. There is no need to pit the modern against the traditional and, as mentioned above, it is a question of blending. Support can, in many cases, come in the form of information on nutrition, health advice, etc. Certainly facilities such as clean water, sanitation and diet can be reinforced through advice and monitoring but parents still have to make their own choices for their children in keeping with their culture and history. Programmes are sustainable when they are developed on the realities of peoples' lives. By including traditional and family structures and local beliefs, people feel that their ways of life are respected and will trust a programme more. If changes are then necessary, it is easier to build on mutual confidence than mistrust. It is within this framework that indigenous models of ECD must continue to be identified and used as the basis for merging modern educational experience and tradition. This would, indeed, be a recognition of the value of methods and know-how from the South. One simple way in which integrated programming might be facilitated is if, for example, it was realized that purpose-built centres don't need to be constructed or sophisticated work tools developed: people's homes, religious buildings, community facilities, even a space under a tree can be used just as professional toys can easily be replaced by stones and sticks, etc. What counts is the attitude one adopts towards children and the way learning is nurtured through the total development of the child and that is possible in most environments unless in situations of conflict and displacement.

Obstacles and constraints may be numerous but governments and authorities are gradually developing policies in the area of ECD. Until recently, facing very high infant mortality rates, developing countries were forced to concentrate their meagre resources on ensuring their children's survival and had to largely ignore the less immediate problem of how to enrich their future prospects. Getting children into primary school was already difficult without even considering developing programmes for early childhood. But now arguments in favour of early childhood development in the countries of the North are as numerous in the countries of the South. It is not just a case of lessening the risk of drop-out in primary schooling but a case of developing personalities capable of adapting to change with a willingness to discover.

Governments, regardless of the amount of money they allocate to ECD, have a crucial part to play. They can modify and instil ECD in the minds of the general public. In setting and endorsing national agendas and policies, governments have the possibility of integrating ECD, even as a concept, into the running of educational and other services in the country. In the case of children with special needs, governments have a particular duty. Ministries need to be given the primary responsibility for the provision of inclusive educational services for young children with special needs and their families. Stakeholders (ministries, health, education, social services, universities, non-governmental organizations, community organizations and families) need to be brought together to develop a shared vision, mission and action plan for early childhood education for all, including an appropriate emphasis on children with special needs. Furthermore, it is governments who, more often than not, are in touch with funding agencies and who have the responsibility of at least ensuring that policy regarding ECD is brought out. If, as research and experience are telling us, ECD leads to competent and confident children growing up with problem-solving capacities and able to participate in society, then it is within the interests of all governments, both in the North and South, to ensure that early childhood programming is integrated into policy and translated into practice. It is true to say, however, that ECD will not and cannot succeed if there is no political, social and economic will or climate conducive to the well-being of children.

What can be done to enhance policy in the area?

"To be successful, changes cannot happen by words or even desire alone. They must be accompanied by behavioural, legislative and material commitment on every level. Teachers must be trained to develop the tools and skills that accompany this new way of thinking. To facilitate these changes, parents also need to be educated about their children's needs as well as their own rights and responsibilities. Continued active involvement by governmental and non-governmental organizations should be seen as useful to complement this request for change" (UNICEF, 1993).

If policies and early childhood interventions are to be successfully developed, action is needed on several fronts, particularly by governments. It could be argued that the presence of early childhood programmes on national agendas will be

determined by the importance given to ECD by policy-makers, planners and child workers at local, national and international levels. ECD growth will also rely on the recognition by governments that it is in the period birth to six-years-old that children adopt their social and mental attitudes, their way of dealing with life and learning itself. There is still, unfortunately, a lack of true commitment to early childhood in many governments and expansion, therefore, is hindered by an absence of leadership and what are considered as more pressing social and economic issues. Yet, governments need to realize that it is precisely the early years of a child's life that offer extraordinary opportunities to avoid or moderate social problems and bring long-lasting benefits to children, families and society as a whole. One basis of governmental concern and a way of stirring public opinion should be the rallying round and the affirmation of children's rights as the basic principles for their protection, growth and safety. With this governmental awareness should come a clear political recognition that children are just as much an integral part of society as adults are. Family education and ECD budgets should accordingly be given an importance worthy of the weight they hold for the evolution and success of society. Building ECD into the general thrust for the improvement of human resources would be one way of achieving this. Strong legal frameworks are needed. Where there is no official framework, family members who look after children can often be subject to a variety of negative conditions (migration, poor working conditions, etc.) and sacrifice the time they spend with their offspring.

ECD is far from being an option for the privileged. It is and should be a necessity for all. Much governmental strategy in the field is still needed in this respect. The following are some guidelines that might be developed to ensure that ECD (research and implementation) finds a permanent place on national governmental agendas and budgets:

- strengthen national awareness, demand and infrastructure at all levels including the family and community level;
- write up and give priority to appropriate national child care, family and parent policies, and give these policies supporting legal and regulatory directives and frameworks. Develop leadership in ECD amongst ministries. Focus attention on the respect of state conventions, agreements and international rights. Develop national master plans on ECD;
- ensure that children receive services directly. Train teachers, families, ECD workers and care-givers;
- be flexible and recognize the diversity of social and cultural needs in children;
- ensure ownership of ECD projects by the community and families, by strengthening community and family-based initiatives and associations involved in ECD. Promote indigenous and community knowledge;
- be cost-effective and integrate programmes such as health and nutrition in a holistic vision of ECD;
- provide further and appropriate guidance and support to children with special needs.

Conclusion

ECD is evolving. It is increasingly being seen as an affirmation of children's rights, and with that has come a growing realization that it is a strong entry-point for human development, a chance for various partners to work cross-sectorally and an opportunity to work effectively with communities. Much remains to be achieved but the importance of early childhood as a potential foundation of society now seems to be recognized. Indeed, the way we view early childhood reveals and mirrors the way we envisage the future of society. It either proves or discredits the conviction with which we believe in change and the evolution of humanity towards greater equity and continued learning. We are realizing today that it is not enough to prepare children for schooling and then push them through its system until they attempt to find jobs, which are, furthermore, increasingly rare. What children need is the ability to cope with a rapidly changing environment, and reach an understanding of others. The ways to achieve this can be argued and argued over, politically and emotionally, yet a part of the answer appears to lie in ECD.

All children are born with the capacity to learn and that is the most solid base on which any society can build. All too often, children are cast away from their potential discoveries and lose their motivation for learning. We can no longer afford to ignore the needs of young children, and, by extension, what research is telling us. We need to provide children with the tools to tackle life and be able to carry the world into the next millennium. Much of ECD has, for many years, been attempting to do just that. Its successes and research are there for all to see. Yet much more is needed again. Campaigns of the kind that have led to environmental awareness need to be launched on matters of child-care and development, so that it is understood that caring, stimulating and loving young children is as important as feeding them. Governments need to commit themselves financially and politically to ECD. Communities and families need to participate in and discover the potential of ECD. Children themselves need to be able to enjoy respect, protection, health and learning opportunities — their basic rights.

Opinions

"If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves."

Carl Gustav Jung, Swiss psychologist (1875-1961)
Gesammelte Werke, vol. 17 (1972), Vom Werden der Persönlichkeit (1932)

"There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in."

Graham Green, English novelist (1904 -1991), *The Power and the Glory (1940)*

"Credulity is the man's weakness, but the child's strength."

Charles Lamb, English writer (1775-1834), *Essays of Elia (1832)*

"He who ignores the future refuses to help childhood."

Kirundi proverb

PARENTS AS CARE-GIVERS, TEACHERS AND LEARNERS: EXAMPLES FROM ASIA

by ***Feny de los Angeles-Bautista***

Now, more than ever, early childhood development programmes make it a point to reach out to parents and work with them. For decades, those who have worked with young children have known intuitively that parental involvement is necessary. ECD programme experiences, from all over the world, are now confirming that fact with recent findings from neuroscience research on brain development from birth onwards: parents are their children's first teachers and the impact of their care-giving goes a long way towards augmenting their children's development and lifelong learning.

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But the ways we work with parents and the reasons we do are as varied as the contexts in which we work with young children. Some see the involvement of parents in ECD programmes as central to the success of any intervention as they are the primary actors in the daily processes involved in the care and education of their children. In fact, some community-based ECD programmes are implemented by actual parents who have learned to take on full responsibility for their community's young children.

Other programmes treat parents as their "audience", to whom "messages" about early childhood development and effective parenting need to be communicated. Others still see parents as beneficiaries or targets for education or even rehabilitation so that they can be "better parents". In other words, programme models for parent education within the context of early childhood care and development can vary a great deal in their goals, their strategies and emphases.

We can draw lessons from the many examples of parent education programmes being carried out around the world. Each has its own specificity and holds precious experience. The range is wide, some are linked to centre-based ECD programmes, increasingly some are home-based models and others still are mobile-programmes if the need arises. Many programmes integrate the use of mass media such as radio within home-based parent education programmes like the Parent Effectiveness Service (PES) in the Philippines. For broader audiences, a daily TV programme called, "PG" (Parents Guide) is produced by the Philippine Children's Television Foundation and broadcast in co-operation with a national commercial TV network with support from advertisers.

Another programme in Thailand, the Integrated Family-Based Early Childhood Development Programme (IFBECD), was designed and implemented jointly by the Royal Thai Government, Mahidol University and UNICEF to reach parents. Two international NGOs, the Christian Children's Fund and Save the Children have also been involved in the programme which is interesting not only because it involves many government agencies and comprises so many key aspects of ECD, but because it works at various levels with academic and NGO partners. The programme components include: public health programmes (nutrition centres, maternal and child health clinics which also provide parent education on primary health care and child development); child-care through home-based, centre-based and mobile ECD programmes implemented by trained community volunteers; non-formal education for youth focused on literacy and vocational training and youth participation in community-based child development centres; primary education to incorporate child-to-child activities in the fifth and sixth grade curriculum; and income generation projects that also include revolving fund and credit schemes that contribute to both food production for family needs and for sustaining the ECCD programmes. IFBECD demonstrates that the impact of ECD programmes which involve parents in various ways is indeed significant - particularly at the level where it matters most: the family. (Herscovitch, 1997)

The main issue in regard to parent education programmes is not so much what form to adopt in terms of programme structure or design (i.e. whether it is linked to a centre-based programme such as a day-care centre or an early childhood education centre or whether it is mainly a neighbourhood or home-based programme with home-visits and interaction) but, rather, the real reasons and aims of parental involvement. Clearly, we must work with parents in a variety of settings, through a combination of strategies including individual interaction, group communication and other forms of dialogue. The choices we make should depend on the social and cultural context in which we implement our programmes, and the resources readily available to us. Ideally, we should be considering the family's lifestyle and what would be most convenient for them. Programmes for parents should not impose too many conditions for parent participation, especially for women who are already burdened with the multiple duties of work in and out of the home. It is important to be flexible and to meet parents on their terms rather than always expecting them to seek access to our programmes and services. Programmes for parents should serve their needs as care-givers and breadwinners for their families as well as meet their desires as adults with individual needs for learning and interaction with their peers.

Since 1994, UNICEF in Vietnam has been backing an endeavour called the Micro-Credit Project, this has involved the Vietnam Women's Union (VMU) and the Early Childhood Development Department of the Ministry of Education with training in six communes and 1,800 families participating. The programme involves home-based ECD programmes which are implemented by parents who have been trained as childminders. Parents are also involved in family-based food production systems, including vegetable gardens, fish ponds and livestock raising. These are financed through a credit scheme which allows the mothers and the childminders to take advantage of loans on a rotating basis as members of a savings group composed of ten women. The women have six months to repay the loan and can apply for three cycles of loans if they have been able to

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repay their previous ones. As members of the savings group, they participate in monthly meetings which also serve as opportunities for parent education on child care, nutrition, safe motherhood, family planning and participation in the savings and credit schemes. Aside from the increase in ECD services for the young children of the participating villages, the programme has also demonstrated a positive impact on women's health and literacy and the food security of their families. (Thi Bich, 1997)

The primary issue we should be thinking about, and revisiting time and time again, is: what are the assumptions we make about parents - as care-givers of their children and as adult learners? And, based on those assumptions, how do we make decisions about both content and processes in our programmes which are intended specifically for parents? Are we so message-driven or content-focused to the extent that we provide too much structure (just like going to school) and overlook the strengths of parents on to which we should be building? Are we working with them on the premise that they have "deficits" and shortcomings which we must fill in or "correct"? In relation to parents from so-called disadvantaged groups do we always assume that there are more weaknesses rather than strengths that we can build on? The assumptions we make about parents' strengths and needs will determine the content and the focus as well as the approaches we choose.

In two resettlement areas in the central island of Luzon, in the Philippines, a non-government organization called the Community of Learners (COLF), has been working with children and parents of one of the country's indigenous groups, the Aetas. 1,000 families and 2,500 children from birth to age 17 participate in the programme which is implemented in two provinces. The programme is supported by the German organization Agro-Action which primarily focuses on rural development but also supports health, emergency and relief programmes. Agro-Action began supporting COLF in 1992 in the aftermath of the eruption of Mount Pinatubo and in the midst of relief efforts. As the partnership evolved it was proposed that an integrated early childhood development programme be organized by COLF in two of the resettlement communities. A centre-based programme for four to six year-olds provides early childhood education, health and nutrition services based on the needs of the Aeta families with a specific curriculum that was developed only after COLF staff had totally immersed themselves in the villages. Older siblings of school-age participate in a "before/after"-school support programme to help them cope with the requirements of formal schools. Before the programme for older children was initiated, there was an alarming incidence of school drop-out among Aeta children who enrolled in the public schools. Now, they are able to stay in school or are helped to return to school. By the second and third year, the younger children, who had two or three years of participation in the ECD programme were already not encountering the problems that their older siblings had when they enrolled in the public schools. But, beyond school readiness and performance, an important objective of the middle years child-to-child programme has been and remains the investment in children as future parents, since Aeta youth often marry at an early age.

The other major component of the COLF family education project is a home-based programme for parents and children under three, organized in each of the

"sitios" or neighbourhoods (composed of a group of families who make up a clan). Parents and children participate in an education programme which includes adult literacy (upon the parents' request on the first year of the programme) and parent-child development activities that support parents as care-givers, especially in the early years. The programme builds on traditional Aeta child-rearing practices, makes the most of local teacher-made materials for both children and parents and emphasizes co-operative problem-solving on issues that affect parental relationships with their children, their families, the clan and the community. Parents learn alongside their children through a curriculum that is built on their own indigenous culture but they are also introduced to appropriate health and nutrition methods and interactive games or home and community-based activities that support children's development. COLF has also maximized parent education programmes as entry points for addressing basic family and community needs such as basic food security and livelihood programmes that enable the families to meet their other basic needs. After six years, several co-operatives have been organized. A basic food and commodities store, vegetable farms, animal-raising activities, rice farming and off-farm activities such as basket weaving and food processing are among the income-generating activities undertaken by Aeta parents as part of the programme. The earnings from the co-operatives are divided into three: the share of the family, the share of the co-operative's revolving fund; the share of the early childhood development programmes.

Through our work at the COLF it has become increasingly clear that we must interact with parents in two fundamental but different ways: 1) as care-givers needing support i.e. empathy and information about the impact of changes in children's behaviour as they grow and develop, as well as practical advice about caring for and teaching children; 2) as individuals and as adults who are also dealing with the changes and challenges of their own life experiences as women and men. Working with young children means working with their parents, and vice-versa - the two are inseparable. It is often easier to deny this non-negotiable part of supporting other family members; by, for example, ignoring the fact that parents have their own learning styles as adults or that they too have personal needs and "issues" to resolve which, in turn, affect their relationships with their children, with their children's teachers and care-givers.

In Sri Lanka, the Home-based Early Childhood Development Programme is supporting mothers in remote communities and is designed to teach parents about the developmental stages of early childhood and the changes that their children go through over time. What is most interesting about the programme is the special attention paid to identifying and maximizing learning opportunities at home through the child's daily routines and activities (upon waking or at bedtime, personal hygiene routines, mealtimes, interacting with visitors, etc.). The programme builds on mothers' daily activities and their work at home (e.g. fetching firewood, washing clothes, looking after the baby and shopping) for stimulating children's problem-solving skills and supporting their language development.

The Sri Lanka experience suggests that the education of care-givers or parents will also need to include the theory and practices of working with adults as

learners, understanding the various stages of adult development, gender issues, and the dynamics of family lives in various cultures. Too often, the focus of the education of teachers, health professionals and social workers has been on the substance and the processes of working with young children, i.e. how to provide them with proper health care and nutrition, and give them stimulating and supportive learning experiences. When it comes to working with parents, the focus has been mainly on content - what they need to know to become better parents. There has been a tendency to dispense facts and practices to parents - and this from outsiders who supposedly know more than them about the caring and teaching of their own children? There has rarely been enough emphasis on ways of observing and listening to parents, to see if we can understand child-rearing practices at play in a family or community before we prescribe what we, with our best intentions, believe are appropriate practices. We need to achieve a balance between these two elements of designing a parent education programme.

It is sometimes easier to work according to pre-packaged curricula with prescribed modules and, whilst this might be more comforting, this practice again falls into the trap of not building on local child-rearing practices, overlooking or even undermining what parents are already doing in support of their children's growth and development. This is not to suggest that we do away entirely with goals, objectives and content and skip the process of curriculum development for parent education programmes. Instead, we should strive for a balance between parents' own experiences and an educational content and process of learning that offers an opportunity for reflection on their own practices. It is important to be well-prepared and to be in a position to reassure parents and respond to them in appropriate ways. But we do need to recognize that parents are also adult learners and that they already have a rich experience and knowledge base on which we can build a parent education programme. It is also important to pay attention to more action-based learning and more experiential approaches that allow parents' full and active involvement as adult learners. Sometimes, it is too easy to hide behind the security blankets of kits, charts, visuals, brochures and learning materials when the most valuable form for supporting parents may well be to listen with empathy and give timely advice or even ask a question that allows the parent to stop and think. Sometimes, the most important investment might be to facilitate connections between parents in a neighbourhood to recreate the traditional support of an extended family.

The challenge for those of us involved in parent education and ECD programmes is to translate the rhetoric of partnership and participation into daily forms of interaction that reaffirm competence and respect in adult learners. The assumptions we make about parents, and the premises which guide our programmes will ultimately determine whether parental "empowerment" as care-givers and teachers of children will just be a politically-correct and attractive label or a real feeling in parents' hearts and minds that can be translated into real benefits for their own children and for themselves.

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Early Childhood Care and Development:
WHERE WE STAND AND THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

by ***Judith L. Evans***

The focus of the world's attention has shifted to the 21st century. The year 2000 is seen as a marker of our progress in meeting the needs of young children around the world. In much the same way that the early years lay the foundation for a child's life, so the accomplishments in the 20th century provide the foundation for work in the 21st century. This section provides a review of what has been accomplished in early childhood care and development in the decades preceding the year 2000.

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Awareness of the value of early childhood programmes has increased significantly

The World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), held in March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, was a major boost to the field of early childhood. During the conference the vision of "basic education" was expanded to include meeting basic learning needs in the earliest years. This expanded definition reflected a recognition that early development provides the foundation for learning in primary school and for productive social contributions in later life. Within the Framework for Action adopted at the Conference it was noted that *learning begins at birth.* It also stated:

"The pre-conditions for educational quality, equity and efficiency are set in the early childhood years, making attention to early childhood care and development essential to the achievement of basic educational goals." (Paragraph 20)

The endorsement given at Jomtien for early childhood programming was in response to overwhelming evidence that it is a sound social investment to provide appropriate support for children's growth and development during the first years of life. Jomtien spurred new interest among many governments and some international organizations in creating and strengthening programmes for the early childhood years.

There is increased understanding of the value of ECCD programmes, based on an understanding of the economic benefits of the investment

Early childhood care and development (ECCD) has been promoted actively by practitioners for decades. Educational psychologists have also been advocates of attention to children's developmental needs during the early years. But neither practitioners nor theorists were able to command national or international attention. What finally made the difference was the attention given to the benefits of quality early childhood programming in terms of cost savings and rate of return on investment. Today, there are convincing data to suggest that increased investment in quality early childhood interventions is economically valid. That is, the rate of return for investment in the early years is higher than rates of return at any other level of the education system.

The most striking example of data in this field comes from the High/Scope Perry Pre-school Project. In that project a group of children from a small community in the USA were followed for a period of 22 years. Some of these children experienced a quality pre-school programme; the other group had no pre-school experience. The experiences of these children were recorded as they progressed through school and moved into adulthood. The most recent data were collected when the children reached age 27. The differences between the groups are dramatic, not only in terms of school achievement, but more importantly in terms of a variety of social dimensions. Those with the pre-school experience as compared with their peers who did not attend pre-school, did better in school, continued their education longer, have better paying jobs and have more stable families. If these characteristics are assigned economic value, the study indicates that the public is receiving an estimated $7.16 for every dollar invested in pre-school (Schweinhart et al., 1993). Data such as these have captured the attention of policy-makers, and national policy in relation to programmes for young children and their families has changed as a result.

Early childhood care and education programmes are a priority for investment within major donor agencies

The international climate in support for programmes addressing the needs of the young child has opened up new funding. It is safe to say, therefore, that political will has improved in response to demand and in growing recognition of the benefits that come from investments in the early years. Indeed, it might be fair to say that attention to children during the early years is now the fastest growing part of the educational sector.

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Countries are creating policies that recognize children's rights and define the role of government in providing support to young children and their families

One of the challenges presented in 1990 was for early childhood educators to work more closely with government to see that appropriate policies be established in support of the development of programmes for young children and their families. This challenge is being met as more and more countries are developing early childhood policies. An example of a supportive policy comes from Ghana. A recent initiative, known as *The Accra Declaration*, provided a new perspective and approach to the country's focus on young children. The Declaration puts highest priority on children who are at greatest risk. It calls upon all relevant government departments, agencies, non-governmental organizations, individuals, and other partners in early childhood development to collectively broaden Ghana's scope and vision for young children. The Accra Declaration has provided the impetus for greater co-operation between government, donors, and non-governmental organizations. It also sets the stage for a very different kind of programming for young children, and offers official sanction for a greater variety of activities to receive attention and funding.

There is an abundance of programmes for the provision of pre-school for children aged three to six

In all corners of the world one can find pre-school programmes for the three to six year age group. Some of these have strong theoretical foundations; others are based on the model for primary schooling which prevails in the country. Some are well known, documented and promoted; others are known only to those whom they serve. Many include high levels of parent involvement and/or are community-based. Almost all attempt to be culturally appropriate, particularly in terms of curriculum and materials used by and with children.

At this point in time there is a lack of comparative knowledge about what has worked and what has not. So, rather than trying to identify "innovative" approaches, attention might more profitably be focused on testing the efficacy of various strategies. It would be useful to identify effective strategies that might be combined to create an integrated programme, creating new, or at least more clearly defined, models that can usefully be disseminated. Furthermore, most early childhood programmes have been created for the three to six year old child. Little programme development has been done for the child from the point of "survival" to the age of three. Yet, as research indicates, it is a critical period in terms of health, nutrition and cognitive stimulation. One challenge might be to develop effective programmes for the very young and their families and overcome this gap in our experience.

There is increasing recognition of the importance of the linkage between what happens in early childhood programmes and children's experience in the early years of the primary school

A primary concern today is the interface/linkage between pre- and primary schools. Part of the impetus for this came from the Jomtien Conference where the early years were linked with basic education. This was built on an understanding of the continuity of children's development from birth through the early primary years. Carrying this thinking through, policy-makers and programmers are seeing the relationship between children's early childhood experiences and their school attainment and performance.

There is increasing concern about the high drop-out and repetition rates in many Majority World (1) countries. These rates are particularly high during the first three years of primary school. The predominant response is that children are not ready for school, so "readiness" programmes have been created. These programmes make the assumption that children will perform better and stay in school longer if the child is better prepared for the school. However, it needs to be recognized that the child does not stand alone. Children's school experiences are based on the interaction between the child and the school. Therefore, another part of the readiness equation is the degree to which the school is ready to receive the child.

Myers (1988), in a review of the research on the relationship between pre-schools and primary school performance, concludes: "Enrolment, progress and performance in school are influenced both by the cognitive and social characteristics a child brings to the school and by the availability and quality of schooling. Either or both of these sets of variables can favour or present obstacles to successful school enrolment, adjustment, progress, and achievement... Programme decisions about early childhood intervention and about improvements in primary schooling should be considered together, not separately."

A range of training and dissemination systems has been created in order to make early childhood programming available to a wider audience

For every early intervention strategy developed, there is an accompanying training system. The Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), for example, began to address the issue of how to provide trained teachers for community-based pre-schools in the late 1970s when they created district training centers where local teachers receive intensive training over a two-year period during school holidays. From KIE and related training experiences it is clear that when training systems are designed to meet the needs of those to be trained and the systems they will serve, it is possible to create effective training.

The challenge is to continue experimenting with more flexible in-service training models, the substance and form of which should be developed from needs and

sound educational practice. Trying to establish the threshold between theory, which means giving teachers a solid enough theoretical base from which they can invent new activities that support children's learning, and practice, which means giving teachers the practical skills they need to get children actively involved in the learning process, is another challenge. The next step will be to take those training programmes which have proven to be effective and to create cadres of trainers who are able to disseminate those programmes to a wider audience.

It has been demonstrated that the most effective programmes are those which "integrate" health, education, nutrition, social and economic development, and that younger children benefit from such interventions more than older children

The latest research on the relationship between health, nutrition and stimulation argues convincingly that an adequate food supply is not enough to ensure a child's survival, neither is access to micro-nutrients, neither is education, nor absence of disease. Children's growth and development is fostered when all these variables are present, within a caring environment. Within the past decade there has been a marked increase in our understanding of the interactive relationship between health, nutrition and education. Research data would suggest that a multi-focal approach is most effective. An elaborate intervention research project was conducted in Cali, Colombia in the early 1970s. Children's experience in the programme differed in relation to the age at which they entered and the type of interventions they received. The interventions included supplementary foods for the family, regular health monitoring, a full-day child-care and education programme, and some parent education. This multi-focal effort yielded positive results in terms of children's health and nutritional status as well as academic achievement. The questions that arise are in relation to the nature of integration and what is meant by "early" intervention. Pollitt notes that, in the studies he reviewed, children who were receiving services from a "younger" age benefited more from them than older children involved in the same programme.

There is a significant movement toward partnerships and greater collaboration between government, donor agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

Not only are attempts being made to create programmes which are cross-disciplinary, but there are moves for greater collaboration between governmental ministries, bilateral donor agencies, and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In particular, bilateral donor agencies and international funding organizations are increasingly turning towards NGOs to create and implement programmes. It is only within recent years that we have begun to see examples of collaborative arrangements which bring together and build on the strengths of participating organizations. This move toward greater collaboration has come about for a multitude of reasons. Among them are the facts that:

a) the global economic crisis has put increasing burdens on governments, which lack the resources to provide the range of supports and services required;

b) there has been a serious questioning about the ways in which foreign aid has been provided, and a realization that traditional forms of aid have not been very effective. Thus, new ways of working with countries are being sought;

c) there is a belief that non-governmental organizations are more flexible, take more initiatives and are more in touch with what is going on at the grassroots level and thus have a wealth of insight and experience that would be helpful in national programming.

The development of partnerships among and between governments, non-governmental agencies and donors needs to continue. To do this there is a need to shift from competition to co-operation. This is not easy for organizations which, historically, have been competitive. But the more the organizations work together and break down the barriers, the greater potential there is for advancement on all fronts, particularly in the improvement of children's well-being.

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1. The term Majority World has been adopted as it more accurately distinguishes the so-called Third World from the First World.

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VALUE OUTCOMES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

by ***Dr David Weikart***

Over the last decades, the provision of early childhood education and care has expanded enormously. In the 1960s, in most developing countries, programmes were generally oriented towards health-care and nutrition supplementation and, in industrialized nations, towards general supervision of children while families were at work. In many countries, special programmes were provided as an emergency service for families experiencing health problems and other types of crises, or short-term programmes were offered to various parent-cooperative playgroups in order to support the general social development of children. In the early 1960s, however, a series of research projects also began looking extensively at pre-school provision in terms of long-range child outcomes. Now, in the 1990s, these projects have reported their findings and, in general, give impressive evidence in support of the importance of high-quality education and care services to pre-school children, aged three, four and five.

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One of the most significant of these studies was the longitudinal High/Scope Perry Pre-school study, 1962-current, operated in Ypsilanti, Michigan, U.S.A. (1). This project, which focused on disadvantaged children from families in poverty, found three major areas of consistent impact about three decades later at age 27. In comparison to a randomly assigned no-pre-school group, the monitored pre-school group had:

Significantly increased educational performance:

- higher education completion rates, and
- reduced need for special education participation.

Significantly increased social stability and responsibility:

- higher marriage rates for young people with more children born in two-parent families,
- higher employment rates and earnings,
- higher rates of home ownership, and
- lower crime rates at both juvenile and adult levels.

Significantly decreased costs for the tax payer:

- for each US$ 1 of programmes cost, US$ 7.16 was saved.

These results can be said to have been achieved because the High/Scope Perry project:

- Empowered children, by enabling them to initiate and carry out their own learning activities and make independent decisions.
- Empowered parents, by involving them in ongoing relationships as full partners with teachers in supporting their children's development.
- Empowered teachers, by providing them with systematic in-service curriculum training, supportive supervision, and observational tools to assess children's development.

While longitudinal research of large-scale pre-school programmes in the United States and elsewhere, such as the National Head Start Project in the United States, have not had such clear results, their general findings are in the same direction (2). A review of programmes in developing countries also indicates that findings are not limited to one country either (3). From these studies, two findings have emerged that are of great policy interest. The first is that educational outcome studies which have focused on children, ages birth to three, have not been able to report the same kinds of long-term gains (4) in child development as those programmes that serve ages three to five. (5) This outcome has been a major disappointment because it makes intuitive sense that if programmes which begin at ages three and four do well, then earlier intervention programmes should help children do even better. What these general findings indicate, of course, is that children go through various stages of development. The tasks of birth to three-year-old children are very different from those of children three to five years old. At the earlier stages, the limited range of child behaviour is more easily supported by generally available experiences in most families as long as the requirements of basic health, nutrition and attachment to a significant care-giver are met. After the early infant-toddler stage of development, as the child approaches three to five, they are ready for and require broader opportunities and activities. Most children aged three to five are more physically mobile, are ready to form relationships with non-family adults and peers, and have sufficient language and mental development to engage in extensive interaction independent of the family. These requirements are harder to support in socially and financially limited environments.

The second area of policy interest is that the content of programmes operated by young children determines their long-term outcomes. Simply having a programme is not enough - what is important is what experience the programme provides. Programmes in many countries often focus on the development of specific academic skills, particularly in countries where there is a great emphasis of academics in the early grades. Several studies have examined the impact of different kinds of content approaches (6,7,8). Looking at the question: "Which type of programme content has the most positive impact upon children?" These studies, especially the Portuguese study in Lisbon (which used the High/Scope Curriculum as one of its pre-school models) and the High/Scope curriculum

models study, found that programmes that have the most positive long-term impact are the ones that give children an opportunity for self-initiated learning, especially when children develop their own intentions and carry them out through their own planned activities. These programmes do not establish pre-academic skills programmes with direct teaching to "prepare" children for school.

These two observations have important policy implications for countries developing early education intervention. First, it means that funders need to be certain that health, nutrition, and other family support strategies are available to children of all ages. However, programmes designed to produce educational outcomes are best directed at ages three to five. Second, while programmes will be applied differently in various cultures and child-rearing traditions, the most effective programmes are based on strategies that allow children to actively construct their own knowledge, through carrying out their own ideas and plans. This finding creates a major challenge for those professionals training teachers. Teacher training must prepare teachers to observe and support children, but the use of a standardized curriculum with content-based teaching units needs to be set aside. Third, because early childhood education is so effective in changing adult behaviour, it requires consideration as a major area of investment by communities and governments. If the purpose of early childhood care and education is simply to provide a safe environment until the parents can take over management of the child, then programming is fairly simple. But, because positive behavioural outcomes are so dramatic, as long-term research verifies, then the actual experience of children in care and education situations is of extraordinary importance to society.

When competing for funding to operate early childhood development programmes, perhaps the most effective argument is economic. In the economic studies carried out by High/Scope (9), the return (based on the three-decade High/Scope Perry Pre-school study of children who had high-quality, early childhood education) far exceeds the cost. While the actual economic return is dependent on various social benefits offered to children and families, in most countries the greater value outcome is the improved responsibility assumed by these children as adults for their families, their work, and general social stability. High-quality, early childhood education accomplishes improved individual performance and responsibility. The fact that it is an outstanding economic investment is almost secondary to that goal.

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APPROACHES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

by Marta Arango

Past conventional approaches to provide child-care and educational services have drastically failed in meeting the integral well-being and needs of young children, and this mainly because the emphasis has only been on approaches and interventions to prepare children for school and to avoid school failure. These conventional approaches, moreover, have been very costly and have not reached the populations most in need.

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The healthy physical and psychological development of young children depends on the quality of the environments in which they grow. For the first vital few years of life, that means the family and then the community. For that reason, any alternative in meeting the needs of children must focus on the family and community as the environments in which development takes place. As such, if programmes are to provide for these basic needs in an integrated way, they should aim to meet the following criteria:

- programmes should be organized to respond to the integral needs of children at different ages.
- programmes should be implemented using strategies that strengthen the ability of the family (especially the parents) or its substitute, to attend to the needs of the child. The education of parents and the involvement of parents in the education and care of their children is crucial.
- programmes should lead to self-help and self-reliance of the family and the community, through their participation and involvement; and
- programmes should be organized to serve as many children and families as possible within the financial, human and institutional resources of the community and country.

Following is a brief description of some of the most common approaches to child-care and development. Each of them is enriched when parents are involved in meaningful ways as educators of their children.

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Centre-Based Programmes

Centre-based programmes vary in size, philosophy, organizational patterns and the specific activities they implement, as well as the degree and type of parent participation. Their main objectives are to provide a safe environment for children whilst mothers attend to other needs. They also meet some of the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional needs of children. They can take the form of pre-schools, day-care centres, neighbourhood centres, or cooperatives. They can serve children for the first six years of their lives, or other specific age groups, according to the needs of the families involved. Parents can play a variety of roles in these programmes: assistants to the professionals, parent educators, principal educational agents of the children, or programme administrators.

1. Conventional Pre-school Programmes

In this type of programme, children go to a centre for three to six hours a day. One advantage of this type of programme is that it gives the mother some free time and can foster the intellectual and emotional development of the child. The drawbacks are: a) it is expensive, b) it is not as effective for the intellectual and emotional development of the child as it would be if the mother took the time to play and interact with the child in the home; and c) by substituting a professional for the mother, it does not allow for the development of the mothers' sense of self-worth and self-reliance in terms of the child's development.

An educational component, which involves the parents in meaningful activities at home and in the centre related to their children's development can enrich the outcomes of this type of programme a great deal. Other parents can serve as resource persons for the programme. Parents and community leaders, carefully selected and trained, can be the assistants and the parent educators for the programme.

2. Day-care Centres

The traditional day-care centre has the virtue of providing a safe place for a pre-school child, leaving the parent free to do other things. Good day-care centres can also provide stimulating environments for the child's intellectual and emotional development. The limitations are that they are a relatively expensive way to care for pre-school children and they tend to be institutionalized settings which can never replace the individual attention and care a mother can give.

One variation of the day-care centre is the day-care home, operated by a professional care-taker. This type of centre also tends to be expensive but comes closer to providing alternative mother-type care in a setting more akin to that of a family.

Another variation is the parent-run day-care centre in which one of the mothers provides the services, or all of the mothers take turns. These are less expensive, provide mother-type care, and extend the effects of the programme beyond the early childhood period, since a bridge is established between home and the centre.

These types of programmes foster a spirit of self-reliance on the part of the care-takers which may even have positive effects on the mothers who are not directly involved in the care-taking process. It should be pointed out, of course, that the mothers who actually tend the centre need training and supervision.

3. Neighbourhood Centres

These centres can vary in size and are usually run by mothers or community leaders. They can operate out of a home or community building. Very often, the mothers of the children serve as volunteers and participate in educational and organizational activities. Sometimes they turn into co-operatives administered by the parents, who develop their own organizational and networking systems.

Neighbourhood centres are less costly than the two previously-mentioned alternatives, and lead to greater participant self-reliance and to the generating of other activities related to the healthy development of young children. At the same time, they can be sources of income generation for some parents in the community.

Home-Based Programmes

The main objective of these programmes is to empower parents with the necessary knowledge, skills and support to attend to all the needs of their children from the moment they are born, thereby making the family the main agent in the education of the children, reducing the cost of child care and education, and effectively using the family and the community as natural educational agents. The parent-child, child-to-child, integrated home-school, and home-visitor programmes also fall within this category. Although some of these alternatives use individual interaction while others use group interaction strategies, all can be administered by parents, community leaders, and older children, in this way leading to enhanced personal development and self-reliance. They require systematic training and supervision, but do not require specific physical facilities, which greatly reduces operating costs - especially when compared to conventional alternatives.

1. The Parent-Child Programme

An example of this type of programme would be one in which the mothers attend a meeting once a week or every other week to learn how to: a) provide a healthy environment for their children, b) observe the development of their children and respond in appropriate ways, and c) use educational materials at home to aid in the intellectual development of their children. In this type of programme, it is the parents, not the children, who come to learn. Some of its advantages are: a) it is less expensive than many other programmes because the cost is limited to paying one teacher, or parent educator, who can work with as many as a hundred parents at a time, as opposed to paying one care-taker or teacher per small group; b) it builds self-confidence and self-reliance on the part of the parents; c) once the parents have learned how to work with other children, they

(including illiterate parents) can be more effective in developing the child's intellectual abilities and in fostering the development of a healthy self confidence. Some of the limitations are: a) absenteeism may be a problem, and only partial learning will take place; b) some parents can not implement such a programme because they are not emotionally stable enough to play with a child in a healthy way; and c) some parents are incapable of implementing the strategies learned and, for example, refuse to play with their children.

2. The Child-to-Child Programme

In this type of programme, children from ten to twelve, who usually have some responsibility with their younger brothers and sisters at home, learn to interact with them in more meaningful ways. At the same time, they learn to be agents for community change. It can be organized as a school programme, using a system that is already in place, or it can be organized independently of the school. This kind of programme goes beyond simply stimulating older children to play with younger children; it helps older children to learn how to interact with their younger sibling(s) in a variety of ways, thus developing a healthy learning environment for both parties. Other advantages of this type of programme are: a) it provides one answer to the problem of parents not being able to participate in a parent programme; b) it is economical; c) it provides good pre-school experiences for the younger child, and d) it is good future parenthood training for the older children.

3. The Integrated Home-School Programme

This kind of programme combines the parent programme with a pre-school programme -- i.e., the mothers come to a centre once a week to learn how to work and play with the children in the home; the children come to the centre two half-days a week to have experiences of living and playing in groups; using, for example, art and music as activities. The advantages of the programme are:

a) the same staff and facilities, that in a conventional programme work with as few as 25 children, can attend to as many as 50 to 75 families, thus ultimately reaching far more children;

b) the programme increases the mothers' self-confidence and self-reliance;

c) it has the virtues of the parent-child programme but still has the advantage of the child going to pre-school, which is often important in the minds of the parents. One disadvantage is that it is more expensive than the parent-child or child-to-child programmes, and is only appropriate for parents who stay part of the time at home, or have other adults in the family staying at home.

4. The Home Visitor Programme

The home visitor programmes, of which there can be many variations, provide individual attention to parents and children in the home, which is very advantageous for mothers with small babies, since, often, these mothers can not participate in activities outside the home. It can have the advantage of providing education within the specific context of the family and several family members can benefit simultaneously. However, unless the home visitor is very sensitive to the individual family setting as well as to the cultural factors at play, a variety of problems can arise. Home visitor programmes can be more costly and labour

intensive than other alternatives, because they use individual, instead of group, interaction. This approach, however, has proven to be very effective and it has been shown that costs can be reduced if the home visitors are community people.

Community-Based Alternatives

These alternatives aim at improving the physical and psychological environment where children grow and develop, by motivating the community to organize itself to solve specific problems and attend to the most pressing needs of children. They can be related to one aspect of the development of the child, or they might be comprehensive, attempting to provide integrated services. One very outstanding feature of these programmes is the active role that community leaders, parents, grandparents and other adults can play in the implementation of a programme.

These approaches try to maximize the use of local institutional, material, and human resources as well as the cultural knowledge and experience of the people. The community participates actively in deciding their objectives and priorities, and quite often specific programme aspects, related to the healthy development of children. Some of these programmes focus specifically on improving the family and community environments where children live. Others, on the other hand, start with a broader focus, and the child-related activities emerge as the programme advances.

Complementary Alternatives

These alternatives have, as a main objective, the articulation of existing parent and child care services and education around new dimensions, i.e. strengthening programmes and enhancing the possibility of achieving a more holistic approach. Another possibility is to add child-care and development to other existing programmes, like housing, adult education or health. For example, a health and nutrition programme where mothers and children attend periodic meetings can be complemented with activities related to the social and cognitive development of the child. Provided they get adequate training, volunteer community people or existing educational agents can assume the new functions. One advantage of these alternatives is that they make maximum use of existing programmes and usually require minimum additional input. However, they require great inter-institutional coordinating efforts, an area where much learning needs to take place at all levels.

Closing Comments

A common characteristic of most of the approaches described in this article is that they try to create better physical and psychological environments for

children by strengthening the ability of parents, care-givers and community people to attend to the needs of young children. They accomplish this by involving parents in a variety of roles: as parent educators or participants in parent education activities; as care-givers or administrators of centres and home-based child-care or ECD programmes; as community leaders cooperating in health, nutrition, income generating and other activities related to the healthy development of young children; as educators of their own children at home; as advocates of ECD programmes and leaders of local and regional networks; and, last but not least, as agents of their own intellectual, social and political development. Parents and community leaders assume these roles in a variety of ways, as paid or volunteer workers, working within formal systems, private voluntary organizations or local NGOs; in either single-focused or integrated programmes; and on either full-time or part-time bases.

Parent and community leader involvement conceived this way is a necessary (but not sufficient) strategy for preventing or decreasing the factors or causes that place children at risk. To be effective, programmes should also have the following characteristics: 1) a training, follow-up and evaluation component; 2) encourage the organization of support networks and involvement with local organizations to build sound relationships, leading to self-reliant projects; 3) a plan for an ongoing renewal of programme objectives and strategies as part of their growth and development and to adjust to the changing social, political and economic circumstances.

Granted that parent involvement and participation in the ongoing development of families and communities may not alone solve the problems of negative home and community environments, past experience and research does, however, demonstrate that such participation and involvement, when integrated with other child-care and education programmes can have significant effects, as outlined below:

- Parents come to understand the context and relevance of the culture in which they live and work, and can provide more culturally relevant child-care and education. There is evidence that even parents with a relatively low formal educational level can benefit and that, with appropriate cultural training, they can become very effective child care-givers, in a relatively short period of time. This does not imply, however, that all aspects of the culture they know and understand will always have a positive influence on the education of their children.
- The knowledge and skills acquired by parents in the process of participating actively in the healthy development of their children can have a multiplier effect, especially if they participate in programmes from the moment the first child is conceived; their learning can influence the whole family.
- Child-care and education programmes that use parent involvement and training as their main strategies contribute to extending coverage and can be made available to isolated populations at a relatively low cost, without sacrificing quality. (Under present financial constraints, many countries, like Colombia, are finding these kinds of approaches very attractive.)

- Parent involvement strengthens the family's role and responsibility in the education of children and contributes to positive, long-term effects on the family and the community.
- When involved actively in the education of their children, parents become "the integrating element" of the different child-care services and types of education surrounding them, and they help to enhance the use of existing services.
- Parent involvement leads to increased interest in the personal and educational development of all members of the family.

I, therefore, strongly feel that parent education and community involvement should be an important component of any child-care and education programme and, if economic conditions of the country do not allow for centre-based programmes, parent education is still an excellent start. Even though there are many interesting parent education and community experiences, they are not well disseminated and more needs to be done to reach more men, mothers, heads of household from urban areas and women in very isolated areas. The radio, and media in general, have much potential to reach these populations and this very potential remains greatly under-tapped.

"THE WHOLE (ALL) MUST GROW THROUGH LEARNING"

by ***Peter Hesse***

People and nature in distress need help - emergency help. This must be accompanied by development assistance. But no human nor state can BE developed. Individuals, groups, states and the world can only develop themselves. The pre-condition for human self-development is a minimum of basic conditions and provisions like clean air and water, food, health-care and shelter, and, for children, parental love, care and guidance. Opportunities for learning and for productive action are further essentials for human development. For national states, the development process requires peaceful, free, just and participatory framework conditions, independent legal systems, respect for human rights and dignity. Help for self-help, the guiding principle of all development aid, may then speed-up self-development.

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Besides essential political efforts for free, just and participatory political conditions, two sets of measures to help self-development are predominant:

1. Short term: socially administered small and micro-credit systems to strengthen self-help initiatives

2. and, more importantly (and the outline for the present article), but only effective long-term: high quality holistic early and practical education for young children

Learning is the most effective key to development

This is true for all kinds and levels of development - but especially for human development and, most of all, for children who need early and qualified learning possibilities to develop fully in life. Surely one of the worst kinds of bondage is the denial of the "development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities" (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). If children are denied the possibility to learn and develop basic positive values, attitudes and capabilities early in life, how can they ever grow in a holistic (body, mind and soul) way ? Therefore, children have a basic natural

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human right to learn which must not be denied. All humanity must recognize the global collective responsibility to stand firm for this basic right of the child since, in all its diversity, all life is interconnected - diversity and unity are no contradiction - and the whole (all) can only grow, if all parts participate.

It is widely recognized that qualified higher education is essential for development, that good practical training is useful for improving opportunities for productive action, and that basic primary education, even if not perfect, is standard. Why, then, is early childhood education often seen as a dispensable luxury? To create ONE world with positive values and tolerant, loving, caring inhabitants who develop their consciousness, and who are willing and capable to join in peaceful democratic global development, positive seeds must be planted early in life.

From utopia to vision

It may seem utopian to believe in such a holistic global development in which every human being contributes to one world in peace and liberty, in self-determined loving and tolerant diversity, consciously respecting his or her social and natural environment. This seemingly utopian idea must, however, mutate into a real vision to be pursued. Each step in this direction is progress.

A vision to be pursued

The following is an attempt to contribute to the international discussion on the vision of high quality early childhood education worldwide - as put forward by the German INITIATIVE PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN ONE WORLD, a group of experienced educators called upon by the Peter-Hesse-Foundation SOLIDARITY IN PARTNERSHIP for ONE world.

Self-initiative and self-help being prime factors for individual (as well as for State) self-development in (and of) the "Third World", the ability to use one's head and heart for thinking and problem-solving is particularly important. Such abilities, learning skills, as well as basic positive attitudes can best be learned at pre-school age - if not even earlier. The first six or so years of life are, moreover, the best time to promote and safeguard the child's natural creativity and spiritual potential.

The first two to three years in early child development can best - if not only - be secured and encouraged by loving and caring parents. Family support services should help when needed but quality pre-school can also be of great help for a child's growth in the years directly following the very first two to three years of life. Furthermore, this would support the UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 29.1.a... "the education of the child shall be directed to: the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities

to their fullest potential". The question, however, is: what should children learn in pre-school and how is it to be taught and in which framework?

The learning goals for children from about three to six years of age- as defined by the German Initiative Pre-School Education at their first meeting in November 1992:

- Learn to learn.
- Develop and unfold positive attitudes towards life, especially towards other human beings and towards one's own responsibility in a social environment; promote and preserve individuality, creativity and spirituality.
- Develop problem-solving capabilities for ONE world in recognized variety.

Wherever traditional methods to further the child's necessary mental flexibility before the primary school age are being lost or remain insufficient to develop positive attitudes and capacities to cope with inevitable change in ONE future world (especially if parents, due to ignorance and/or hardship, cannot provide it), children are missing opportunities for self-development which cannot be made up for later. In addition to love, care and understanding from the parents, stimulus is needed, adapted to the child's natural learning behaviour and cultural environment. This may be achieved in a variety of ways, mostly, however, through good pre-schools which correspond to the criteria and guidelines hereafter.

Methods proven in practice, like Montessori, exist but so do didactic approaches and activities, mainly aiming at large-scale coverage, which fail to achieve the goal of the best possible early childhood development and are a waste of resources. Unless we provide a chance for early holistic personal development to children in the "Third World" using the best possible educational methods on the basis of professional knowledge of how human beings develop - with culturally-adapted practical primary education from the age of approximately six years - the gap between the more and the less developed countries will widen still further. The objective of this initiative is to promote the best possible holistic pre-schools in the framework of early childhood education, mainly in the "Third World".

Criteria and guidelines for good quality pre-school (ages three to six):

Fundamental concepts

- Orientation towards the development of the child is based on a continuously growing holistic (mental/spiritual/physical) view of human beings

- Work with children and with their parents is equally important
- Pre-school should be integrated in the surrounding social framework and should encourage participation

Concerning the pre-school educators

- Best possible holistic pedagogical training and retraining is a pre-condition. This includes, primarily, conscious recognition of the individual; communication with the child and furthering of the individual development potential of the child; ability to co-operate with children, colleagues, parents, institutions
- Theoretical learning must be combined with practical training in a pre-school. Pedagogical education may include support by technical electronic media such as learning aids
- Children establish relationships with their educators and should work with them long-term. This cannot be achieved without securing the educators commitment and their profound motivation
- It is necessary to establish, finance and maintain a support system for the training and further education of the pre-school teachers and their instructors

Pedagogical principles

- The learning path towards mental consciousness is achieved through grasping the world with the bodily senses. Therefore, sensory experience is a basic element in pedagogical work
- Pedagogical work must be based on practical activities which are aligned to local values and principles of action, providing insight into the inter-dependence of the various aspects of life. Activities which a child can understand and which the child acts upon are at the forefront of pedagogical work
- Meaningful learning grows from relevant situations in real life. Creativity, positive attitudes towards life, joy of learning and concentration grow out of the ability to understand
- Joy and willingness to communicate are to be furthered. The wealth of speech and language expressions should be opened up for children
- Imitation and subsequent use in the child's own meaningful activities are to be encouraged
- Children must be able to relate what they learn to their own experiences; thus grasping what they learn in the true sense of the word
- Play is a major component of the child's life. The seriousness of playing must be recognized and stimulated. The child's play corresponds to the adult's work
- Play must not be subject to a purpose
- Didactic material used by children for work, for training in specific

skills or for creative play, must correspond to learning steps which a child can comprehend, and match the child's development stages

- Small children, in particular, have intensive needs for movement, which require due attention and space
- Harmonious rhythmic change between phases of movement and rest is to be aimed at as a working method and a tool for health.
- Rhythm is helpful in life-orientation and a source of strength
- It is important for the child to be able to gain security through the rhythm in his environment created by culture and nature
- Surroundings, local culture and nature are to be recognized and integrated in a responsible way
- Artistic penetration of pedagogical work as well as artistic activities of children are to be cared for as a basis of a child's development of his personality
- Best-possible use of locally available material is essential

To be rejected are

Activities and principles which lead to early intellectualization and overloading with information which suppress the children's spontaneity, for example:

- Frontal "teaching" as a main method
- Simply repeating what the teacher says
- Uncritical transmission of educational values from other cultures.

Technical electronic media as learning aids are to be rejected in this age-group. Even children's programmes place too high demands on the pre-school child's ability of abstraction and perception. Film and TV prevent sensible holistic learning, disturb learning in direct contact with the environment and with other people, and promote isolation and speechlessness.

Minimal framework-conditions for pre-school especially in the "Third World"

- Secure space, inside and outside, for movement, play and concentration with sufficient air and light
- Flexible, multi-functional and local furniture which can be handled by children. At least one sitting space for each child
- Water for drinking and for washing
- Children must not suffer hunger
- Hygiene, health and nourishment are to be seen as one in the educational situation. There needs to be co-operation with health-workers, wherever possible

● Material for handling/experimenting/playing which stimulates the imagination in multiple ways should be adapted to children, and be of natural, locally-available origin

Concerning the parents

● Parents are to be encouraged to send their children to pre-school and later to school and to promote the creation of schools

● Parents have to be won as partners who enhance the pedagogical work in pre-school and school, who understand the work and actively support it. Parents' abilities are to be integrated

● Pre-school can and will also be a source for the development of the community as well as for the further training of parents - especially mothers

Didactic pre-school concepts and methods which are based on the above learning goals, which fulfil the above criteria and follow those guidelines, are basically to be recommended.

Interested educators are invited to interact in the above subject-matter and to join in promoting best possible early childhood care and development in and for ONE world.

FROM CENTRE-BASED PRE-SCHOOL TO INTEGRATED CHILD AND FAMILY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING [1]

by ***John Bennett***

In this short presentation, I would like to outline why UNESCO over the past years has moved from an academic conception of early education to one that takes into account the educational and social needs of the family environment. In tracing this evolution, the following will be briefly examined:

1. A brief look at the history of pre-schooling, outlining why the school and its replica, the pre-school, became so important in the 19th century. In this respect, we note the inability of that model to meet the needs of children today in both the developing and industrialised worlds.

2. The growth of a new model of integrated child and family programming. In particular, we mention the pioneering work of Robert Myers and the later debate in the Netherlands, which attempted to address the challenge of children and families 'at risk'. Some of the characteristics of the new model are outlined.

3. The socio-political underpinnings of the new model, that is, a brief identification of some political and social concerns that are leading to an expansion of early education and moving it to a more social vision of education.

For a number of reasons, the change in UNESCO's approach to early childhood education constitutes an important conceptual shift towards the spirit of the 1990 Jomtien Education for All Conference, which affirmed that "learning begins at birth". Because of our long experience in formal education, it is easy to overlook the pervading influence of families and consider the school as the central, indeed the only educational agency. As Brofenbrenner (1979) has shown, that view of reality is too simple. An adequate view of human development must do justice to the relationships between children and the multiple socio-cultural contexts in which they live, in particular the family and local community or socio-cultural group in which the child's family lives. Although family is obviously not the only influence on the child, it is seen as the primary mediator to the child of other significant environments, the source of education and the indispensable partner of the school. To understand why it has taken so long to arrive at this common-sense position, let us take a brief look at the history of early education.

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A brief look at the history of pre-schooling

Pre-schools in Europe have their roots in the 19th century. In general, they sprang from the work of inspired educators or from charitable initiatives to look after young children who came from backgrounds of extreme poverty or abandonment. These movements were charismatic, responsive to local needs and often family oriented. However, throughout the century with the growing consciousness of social and political rights, the organisation of public services by the State gradually gained in strength. From 1880 onwards, many of the early education or charitable initiatives were simply incorporated into the public school system, as in France and Belgium, or, as took place in Britain and the United States, slowly declined as day-care centres and infant schools to stagnate in protective care thinking and failed to integrate the educational insights of continental thinkers. State school systems were, however, very different in character to the local initiatives of charitable groups. They were national in their outreach and directive in content and method. In the 19th century, the primary school appropriated children from family and community culture, aiming to transform them into disciplined workers for the new industries. In addition to teaching literacy, elementary science and mathematics, the school also had a high moral and national aim. The national language and the moral foundations of citizenship were inculcated there to young children, sometimes in direct opposition to local culture and tradition.

In most countries, despite the best efforts of enlightened educators, the absorption of early care and education into the national school system brought about an academic take-over of early education and a loss of its specific identity. Kindergarten, with its emphasis on parent contact, health and motor development, play and discovery, local culture... became an "école maternelle", an infant or nursery school offering to young children aged 3 to 6 years an educational curriculum supervised by a professional teacher. This was the pre-school model inherited by UNESCO at its foundation, a model that worked very successfully in France, where UNESCO was situated. For almost forty years, UNESCO was to promote the model to Ministries of Education, albeit with attempts to reform its didactic character and to promote a more child-centred pedagogy.

The High Quality Pre-school Model

Pre-school can be an excellent model:

– when the nutrition, basic health and the psycho-social well being of children are ensured in families;

– when an attractive learning environment, consistent scheduling and appropriate group practices are offered;

– when the interaction between the teacher and children is warm, positive and yet professional. Research suggests that curriculum at this stage has a lesser impact on outcomes than process, that is, the skilful conduct of the relationship between adult and child, the staging of developmental inputs at the right moment and the provision of opportunity for the child to learn actively;

– when parents are encouraged and educated to assume a significant role in the educational

process and management of early childhood centres.

However, these conditions were often not fulfilled in either Western or developing contexts. In particular, the model proved unsuitable for the many developing countries that, from the late 1970s onwards, were unable to provide primary education for their growing cohorts of children. (2)

Source: Substantive Report on Early Childhood and Family Education, *UNESCO, 29th Session of General Conference 1997*

Pre-school in developing countries

Confronted by vastly increased numbers of children and the new demands of changing economies and cultures, the primary education systems created in developing countries after decolonisation were placed under great strain in the late 1970s and 80s. Millions of children, especially girls, no longer went to school or dropped out along the way. In this crisis situation, many education ministries, and indeed, UNICEF and UNESCO, saw early childhood education as a distraction. Why invest in young children if they were destined at a later age to be denied access to or quality in primary schooling?

Furthermore, education ministries could no longer afford to invest in pre-schools. Few in number, often privately owned and fee-paying, these schools catered essentially for the children of expatriates or of the wealthier classes in the larger urban centres. Support for them meant inevitably, drawing away public investment from universal primary education. Obviously, UNESCO, a United Nations agency committed to the basic principle of non-discrimination in education, could no longer recommend the model.

The growth of a new model: integrated child and family programming

It was to take a number of years before a new model of early development could be conceptualised. It came from a number of sources. On the one hand, there was the work of Robert Myers and the Consultative Group on Early Childhood. This body, working essentially in developing countries and co-operating closely with UNICEF and UNESCO, gradually built up a broader conception of early childhood programming. Myers, in his landmark book, *The Twelve Who Survive* (1992), documented successful programmes from the developing world and showed convincingly:

- That for a number of reasons, a narrowly focused education model, either conceived as a pre-school or an extension downward of primary school, did not meet the needs of the majority of children, families and communities in developing countries;

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- That there existed a broad range of programme options to promote child development. The innovative work of many governmental and non-governmental bodies in the developing world had proven that effective, low-cost early development programming was possible;

- That even the poorest countries, by giving support to families and to what is best in community child-rearing traditions, could radically improve the development of children and mobilise popular support for their welfare and education.

The primary aim of such programming was to help parents to have and rear healthy children, often in survival contexts in which the State was unable to offer any kind of social service. In such conditions, programmes had to be simple, essential in their aims and go to where people lived. Emphasis was given to maternal and infant health; immunisation, breast-feeding, hygiene and primary health care; food supplementation and the provision of clean water; simple infrastructure maintenance, basic education and community credit schemes, especially aimed at women...

In some developing countries, child and family programmes are partially funded by the State. They can reach impressive proportions, such as the Integrated Child Development Services in India, which caters for some 15 million children and mothers. In other countries that are poorer or are governed by less socially-minded governments, programmes depend on family and community solidarity aided by voluntary effort. All contexts show, however, that unless there is appalling poverty or war conditions (3), families and communities, when given support, are capable of organising surprisingly good quality care and education for infants and toddlers based on traditional community values and child-care practices. The central role of mothers and girls is proven time and time again as the main educational influence on children and as their most constant carers and providers.

In parallel, some industrialised countries also began to question the validity of the early education pre-school model. In the early 90s, the Netherlands conducted a debate concerning the multi-faceted problems of children and families 'at risk'. Dutch concern was corroborated by OECD research, which in 1995, identified 15 to 30 per cent of the children of school age in OECD countries as being 'at risk' of failing in school. Researchers in the Netherlands concluded:

- That the provision of formal kindergarten and primary education did not guarantee equality of opportunity in education;

- That more could be done to improve the internal efficiency of kindergarten and early primary schools in their country, but that further educational research was needed before deciding which types of programme would work best in the Netherlands;

- That co-ordinated, decentralised services - combining employment, education (including adult education), health and social welfare inputs at community level- would have a better chance of reaching families and communities 'at risk', giving children an environment that would allow them to benefit from educational opportunity.

In short, junior school and early childhood programming - while preserving their specific, professional aims - were to be seen as part of a larger social integration initiative. Early childhood programming, in particular, seemed a particularly suitable vehicle to provide multiple inputs to both parents and children. If carried out in a flexible, integrated and culturally sensitive manner, programmes supporting young children and families could become a privileged space for self-organisation, the basis for empowerment of individuals and groups.

What are the characteristics of the emerging model?

There are many characteristics of the new model that demarcate it from classical schooling. In the space allowed to me, I shall briefly describe three, one of which is the responsibility of the sponsoring government ministry, the second the responsibility of principals and teachers and the third, the shared responsibility of local services, parents and teachers. My remarks relate essentially to centre-based nursery schools or kindergarten for children aged 3 to 6.

- Greater attention to structural quality factors. Structural quality factors are essentially the responsibility of government. Research suggests that unless these quality factors are ensured, centre-based programmes will not support child development as they should and thus become a poor national investment. Hence, more progressive States are concerned to ensure the following quality factors in their systems, viz.: sufficient and stable investment; a supportive legal and regulatory framework; a planned approach and evaluative capacity in the system; high-level pre- and in-service training; curriculum or programme content that is supportive of child development; early entry of children at three years or younger; sufficient intensity of programme (at least four half days per week); sufficient duration of programme (at least two years before entry into primary school); favourable child-adult ratios (1 adult for 8 children maximum); involvement of parents...

- Greater attention to internal quality factors. The "classical" pre-school was characterised by a narrow focus on instruction aims (hence, much dependency on a structured curriculum and work sheets), a high proportion of time spent in large group settings (25 or more children with one adult) and the downgrading of social needs, motor development, etc. However, since the early seventies - and prior to the effective school movement - the internal processes of infant school have long been undergoing change. As outlined in Box 1 above concerning the high quality pre-school, the skilful conduct of the relationship

between adult and child, the staging of developmental inputs at the right moment and the provision of opportunity to the child to learn actively are key elements in implementing the centre's programme. In bringing about these changes, the High/Scope model in the USA has been very influential and it has been joined in recent years by a number of first-class programmes based on constructivist education principles. Academic education is avoided, greater stress being put on autonomous, active learning and the age developmental needs of the child.

- Greater attention to social integration, often reflected in outreach to disadvantaged families and communities. Because of migratory movements across Europe and the Mediterranean, the more industrialised countries of Europe have today large numbers of immigrants. Along with local populations that have been left behind by social and economic change, they constitute a significant underclass whose children fail to benefit from educational opportunity. Early childhood care and education is seen as a means of reaching and educating those groups, while ensuring that their children will enter school on more or less equal terms with children from more favoured backgrounds. The link between parents and their young children is used as a springboard toward family education and early identification of risk. There is concern to embed early care and education into the wider social services for children and families at risk. In itself, however, early education is seen as a leading intervention as not only does it provide a fair start to young children, it can also be used to generate commitment to education in families, which research shows has a powerful influence on educational outcomes. In brief, what is being sought is a two-way process: support for families and children 'at risk' by the school and on the other hand, the support of parents for education and child development, their ownership - with the teachers and community - of the educational project.

The socio-political underpinnings of the new early education model

To appreciate the internal characteristics of the new kindergarten programmes, an understanding of constructivist education principles is helpful and, at institutional management level, of school effectiveness principles. But such principles can and are being used also in exclusive pre-schools. What is perhaps more relevant for policy-makers is to understand the political and social frameworks that have powered the move towards mass early education, making it at the same time a more socially oriented community service. I have chosen four framing elements for brief comment:

- *The gradual evolution of States from classical liberalism to social democratic models:* classical liberalism sees the liberty of the individual as paramount in society. The primary duty of the State is to protect the possessions and lawful activities of the free citizen. According to this

theory, those who are unemployed or who are not productive members of society cannot reasonably expect the same living standard as others. Assistance, however, is granted through the good will of governments and taxpayers but it can be withdrawn. Because of their inability to directly exercise their rights, children in classical liberal practice remain in the shade. The assumption is that families, not the State, should look after children.

A social rights approach, found most typically in social democratic countries, would likewise cherish liberty but limits it in the name of other values such as justice, fairness and equality of opportunity. It is an approach that has become highly influential in all democratic countries, although in times of economic recession, there is a tendency to swing toward the older liberal approach. A core tenet is the entitlement of the individual to a minimum standard of living. In this regard, as various human rights instruments affirm, the State has special duties toward children and should provide for their development and education (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Hence, the tradition established in social democratic States of providing widespread early childhood services.

It should be clear, however, that the appreciation of the social rights of children is based on interest as well as on greater sensitivity to human rights or the social responsibility of government. With greater capacity to undertake comparative cost benefit measurements, even the classical liberal States recognise that, in the long run, it is less expensive and more stable politically to prevent social problems rather than to suffer their consequences.

● *The linking of early education with the promotion of gender rights and the reconciliation of work with family responsibilities.* In the industrialised world, the massive entry of women into the labour force is inevitable for a number of reasons, e.g. in European Union countries, the opportunity costs of keeping mothers out of the labour market to care for their children at home, may well be higher than to provide public care and education facilities. Another reason is that the contribution of women, because of their higher educational qualifications, is becoming more valuable in the labour market. In many industrialised countries, girls are not only forging ahead of boys in the humanities but also in science and mathematics. If their talents are not to be lost to the labour force, then governments must provide large-scale public services to look after young children and engage in a reorganisation of work practices so as to facilitate parental time with young children.

In addition, public opinion - even in the social democracies - has become much less tolerant about long-term public assistance. The welfare to work movement has begun to set stringent time limits on benefits paid to "welfare mothers" and strongly encourages return to work. Again, the growing awareness of the benefits to children of high quality early education gives further reasons to bring women into the labour force and hence to increase centre-based care and education provision.

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● *The embedding of early childhood education and care into broader social integration policies and integrated community services.* With the ageing of Western societies, there is greater concern than ever before about neighbourhood security, the socialisation of children and the cohesion of society. The realisation has grown that our societies are vulnerable from within and that the basic socialising institutions, the family and the school, are not functioning as effectively as in the past. Even in wealthy families in industrialised countries, children are faced with a series of potentially traumatic transitions owing to the increase in divorce, recomposed families and the mobility of parents in search of work. For this reason, countries sensitive to social integration increasingly require educational agencies - without abandoning their teaching and discipline-based professionalism - to rethink their institutions in terms of the contribution they are making to social cohesion.

Early childhood programmes are particularly suitable for a more socially oriented approach, as children of this age group begin their primary socialisation with other children. The bases for self-regulatory behaviour, co-operation and respect for others are laid in this period. In addition, because of the vulnerability and multiple needs of children at this age, parents tend to be more in contact with the programme or institution. The early childhood centre is therefore a privileged place to provide families with a wide range of services that help their children and promote social integration.

● *Educational reform and the movement toward lifelong learning.* At the dawn of the information age, societies are becoming more aware of the need to reform education systems, to broaden them and prolong their offer from birth to senior citizen age. For many educators, an essential strategy in reforming the primary school is to provide young children in early education with language and social group skills, pre-literacy and numeracy experience that can be formalised in the primary school (Bentolila, 1996). When combined with family environment education, early childhood education is a practical move towards the organisation of "education societies", towards establishing lifelong education for all.

Conclusion

In the interests of children, we need to change our conceptions about the nature of education and its typical means of delivery. In the new "education societies", ministries of education can no longer be content to be ministries of schools. They will need to evolve from a subject focused approach to a more child-centred one and eventually - particularly when dealing with young children - towards a family-centred and community development approach. As job mobility, maternal employment and divorce rates increase, more outreach to families will become necessary, to help young children cope with transitions, to give parents support and provide them with continuing education. The rapid transition that we are

making towards the globalisation of economies and the new information society will probably exacerbate matters, leaving significant populations excluded from economic and social progress. In this context, our societies will need kindergartens and schools that ensure the education and development of children and that co-operate fully with other services in providing social support and further education to families.

Endnotes:

1. For the sake of brevity, I refer to integrated child and family educational programming as family education. Depending on the organisation of education already existing in a country, other terms may be more useful, such as adult education or community education.

2. A relatively small country like Bangladesh, about the size of the United Kingdom, has as many children under six years as the entire European Union.

3. In Rwanda today, in the aftermath of the massacres, it is calculated that there are more than 40,000 child-headed households.

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Case studies

"The children of any nation are its future. A country, a movement, a people that does not value its youth and children does not deserve its future."

Olivier Tambo, *South Africa*

"The child is father of the man."

William Wordsworth (1770-1850), *My Heart Leaps Up*

"Too much and too little education hinder the mind."

Pascal (1623-1662), *Pensées*

"It should be noted that children at play are not playing about; their games should be seen as their most serious-minded activity."

Montaigne (1533-1592), *Essais (1580)*

1. The SERVOL Early Childhood Education Programme

Trinidad and Tobago

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Servol's Mission

Servol is an organization of weak, frail, ordinary, imperfect yet hope-filled and committed people seeking to help frail, ordinary, imperfect, hope-drained people become agents of attitudinal and social change in a journey which leads to total human development. It does so through respectful intervention in the lives of others and seeks to empower individuals and communities to develop as role models for the nation.

Servol (Service Volunteered for All) is an organization based in Trinidad and Tobago which runs an innovative Early Childhood Education Programme (ECEP) with financial backing from the Ministry of Education. Today, all the public pre-schools in the country are run by the Servol/Ministry of Education programme. Servol, over the years, has managed to instil a strong awareness in the country, and particularly at political level, as to the importance of the early years of life. Proof of Servol's success is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has established a budget of US$ 45 million for Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions over the period 1997-2002 and entrusted Servol with the responsibility of training teachers and supervising the programme in the whole country.

Servol's programmes are carried out in a variety of places, ranging from churches, houses or community centres. They are run by the communities in which they are situated. Communities are asked to maintain buildings, organize themselves into eight-person school boards of education to supervise the projects, choose teachers for training, collect school fees and volunteer time to help with a given project. Servol provides training to teachers, even to teachers who previously came under the Ministry of Education.

The Servol Early Childhood Development programme is based on a number of basic assumptions which have been tested over time:

a) Nearly all personality development of children occurs between the ages of 0-3 and, by the time children are five, they are already resistant to change. One can certainly help children cope with

personality problems at a later stage, but not much can be done to change them. The period 0-3 is a window of opportunity for change and learning for the child. The main aim is to protect the spontaneity and creativity of small children and to allow them to be as free as possible during the first critical three years.

b) Home-based care-givers are generally parents and community members. They have a far greater influence on small children than teachers or other secondary care-givers.

c) The world children have to grow up in is not as "friendly" as it was in the past. It is a tough world full of competition and to survive children have to develop strong personalities and healthy self-esteem.

d) Servol advocates *attentive listening*, that is, being receptive to what is important in people's lives. This extends to small children and adults. This means that any intervention has to be respectful of the context. Adults are, however, encouraged to get rid of their *cultural arrogance*. Just because they are adults doesn't necessarily mean that they know what is best for children.

e) As a consequence of all the above, the only form of ECD which can enhance the development of a child into an adult with a positive self-esteem and willingness towards life is a programme that is high-quality, parent-oriented and community-based.

Despite beliefs about what "good schooling" can do for children, it is obvious that not all schools can provide good care and learning opportunities, especially when it is known that most character development has already taken place before entry into primary school. Servol strongly believes that a well-adjusted caring child is so because of his or her family background and not because of school. School can soften some anti-social behaviour but not change dysfunctional behaviour.

The ECEP curriculum, otherwise known by the acronym SPICES, requires the teacher to help the child develop physically, intellectually, creatively, emotionally and spiritually. Rather than pressure young children into reading, writing and counting at the earliest age, the syllabus aims to help toddlers develop a positive self-image, to be resourceful and curious about learning, and to be responsible and caring towards the world around. For example, each part of the SPICES teacher guide presents distinct targets such as "The child is able to share experiences with others" and "The child is able to express ideas/feelings through an art creation". Art, drama, music and dance are encouraged through the making of mobiles or puppets, by exploring sounds and acting out family roles. The curriculum is also geared towards learning about regional history. Children, for example, make Caribbean masks, costumes and instruments for carnival. Intellectual activities involve concepts of time, space, language, colours and pre-writing skills.

The programme emphasizes self-expression, participation and creativity, and requires teachers to become involved with each class. According to one

evaluation, "the pre-schools themselves are a joy to be in. The pre-school teachers are all trained in classroom management so they are not averse to children moving about and becoming involved in many activities." In accordance with what research from many countries is showing, Servol is more attached to giving loving and proper care to children than defining a pre-school programme based on the ingestion of facts. Servol wishes to create a rich environment of learning for children, but also to work with parents and other care-givers to ensure that the home environment is conducive to learning as well. Personality development, as previously stated, occurs before the age of pre-schooling. It is vital, therefore, that the home be prepared to stimulate and surround the child in a positive way.

Several evaluations praise the curriculum noting that students who enter schools after Servol pre-school tend to be more sociable, speak up in class and generally communicate more than traditional pre-school children do. In traditional primary schools children mostly learn reading, writing and arithmetic and are expected to always sit at their desks or tables except during break periods. Although some primary school teachers have visited Servol pre-schools and adopted some of their teaching methods, there is a "danger over the long-term for children to forget what learning is about". Servol is there to remind them.

Since 1988, Servol's pre-school teacher training programme has been able to issue certificates recognized by Oxford University in the United Kingdom. The university acts as Servol's outside assessor. Teachers play a particularly important role at Servol. They are, for example, encouraged to write books for the children and interact with parents. Recognizing that parents are the primary care-givers, each teacher is responsible for setting up a parent education programme. "Rap sessions" are held at which teachers try to persuade parents that excessive discipline and neglect of small children crushes natural creativity and potential. Teachers speak to parents about hygiene, nutrition, environmental issues and the child's emotional development. In most pre-schools, teachers have noted improved cleanliness, punctuality and attendance of children over the year, while parents seem to express more love, praise and encouragement for their offspring. The results are particularly evident amongst teenage parents, early pregnancies being a major problem on the island. "Teenage parents are more responsible and they both take an active part in caring and looking after their children", says one report. In some areas, the district health nurse is invited to speak to parenting classes. This method has been fruitful: in all but one of the 105 nursery schools surveyed in 1992, junk food, candy and soft drinks had disappeared from children's lunch boxes and had been replaced by fruit, vegetables and other healthy foods. Parents now often help with school outings, sports days, field trips and concerts. They supervise the pre-schools and even stand in when teachers have Servol workshops and seminars. This parenting programme highlights the links between early childhood and adolescence: teenage parents are the most willing to attend parent education courses, and who appear to get the most out of them. According to a 1990 evaluation, they seem more open than older parents to new ideas and ways of rearing children advocated by trainee teachers.

Community involvement is, therefore, essential to the functioning of the Servol early childhood activities. The link between parents, community and pre-schools is strengthened by involving each party in the actual elaboration of the educational experience. For example, through community meetings and home visits, parents are asked to talk about physical punishment and persuaded to refrain from physically punishing their children. They are persuaded that the simplest and best thing they can do is to allow the child to discover the richness of life. Servol staff members also try and prove to parents that instinct is not enough to guide them in their relations with children. Parents have to learn to read their child's temperament like a language. The popular belief that it is enough just to love a child is not true - adequate nutrition, stimulation and care have to be combined in a total approach. Consequently, an important part of the training of teachers and field officers is to equip them with communication skills which allow them to handle children and speak to adults who can, at times, be reticent and firmly fixed in their ideas of how to bring up a child. In the words of Servol "the teachers' task is to persuade primary care-givers that the disciplinarian type of care-giving which might not have done too much damage in the past, could well spell disaster for the child of the third millenium."

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2. PROMESA

An Integrated Community-Based Early Childhood Education Programme carried out by CINDE (Centro Internacional de Educacion y Desarrollo Humano)

Colombia

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CINDE

CINDE's 20 years of experience parallel the development of PROMESA. As a research and development institution it has evaluated and systematized as many dimensions of the PROMESA experience as has been possible and is compiling all the available information this year with support from the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The most important lesson learned from this experience is that young children's programmes appear as the very basis for integrated and sustainable social development - the perfect window for intervention and change. Social development is a long process that requires a critical mass of organized people involved in a variety of participatory educational processes and actions to produce cumulative effects — and PROMESA has managed to do precisely that. The role of NGOs in social development programmes in isolated areas appears crucial: it is the glue that sticks all the pieces of the puzzle together.

PROMESA, Project for the Improvement of Education, Health and the Environment, is CINDE's largest and most long-term programme, and is being carried out on the Pacific Coast of Colombia in a hot, humid and isolated area, accessible only by boat or small plane. The programme was initially designed as an alternative participatory approach to ECCD (Early Childhood Care and Development) focusing on creating healthy physical and psychological environments for the development of children at risk. It was to serve as a basis for integrated sustainable social development.

Embedded in PROMESA is a concept of community development based upon the notion that individuals must be involved in their own process of development, and that, for development to occur, there must be a simultaneous process of change in the intellectual, physical, economic and socio-cultural aspects of life. Moreover, for this transformation to take place,

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individuals need to develop the ability to solve problems, think logically and develop the confidence to carry out such changes. The approach is based on the following concepts:

1. The healthy development of young children depends on the quality of the environments in which they grow; that is, the family and the community, especially in the most important first years of life

2. To achieve sustainable, integrated social development, each individual and community must be involved in, and generate, his/her own development processes. This requires a process of cumulative change in a critical mass of people in different areas of human and social development: the psycho-social and educational, the physical, the productive and the socio-cultural. Through these processes, individuals and groups gradually strengthen their self-confidence and ability to solve problems and obtain more energy to face more and more complex problems and use the resources from their environment more effectively

3. Changes should be articulated around and within the family.

During its first ten years, PROMESA was sponsored primarily by two Dutch organizations, the Bernard van Leer Foundation and CEBEMO. The project started in 1978 with 100 families in four small farming and fishing villages and involved training community mothers as parent educators and community leaders. It now serves approximately 7,000 families both along the coast and in the interior regions of Chocó, while variations of its approach, or components of it, are being implemented in other parts of the country and even abroad.

The methodology

The programme began by encouraging groups of mothers, under the leadership of *"promotoras"*, or community leaders (who were also local mothers), to stimulate the physical and intellectual development of their children from birth to six years of age, by interacting in meaningful ways with them; for example, playing games in the home. Gradually, during meetings, mothers began to identify other problems related to topics such as health, nutrition, environmental sanitation, vocational training, income generation, and cultural activities. Over time, as individuals started gaining confidence and developing a greater understanding of their overall needs, PROMESA expanded into an integrated community development project, with the entire community participating in one or more aspects of the programme. The various activities developed can be classified into four basic components: socio-intellectual, physical, productive, and socio-cultural.

Psycho-social and intellectual development has been directed at the continuous education of adults through workshops, self-study groups and

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follow-up activities aimed at improving the quality of life and family interactions. Most of the participants are parents of children aged up to nine, who are interested in improving the quality of their physical and psychological environment and in enhancing the development of their children. Education for these parents involves programmes to learn how to provide a healthy environment for young children, vocational training, and education for leaders. It also involves the development of a set of educational toys and games to improve interaction between parents and their children and to encourage processes of logical thinking. Pre-school and nutrition centres are also organized and run by the community, with the support of local institutional agents. The physical development component includes health, nutrition and environmental sanitation. The most important accomplishments of this component have been, and remain, the development of a primary health-care system administered by the community based on an approach of Health Promotion. It includes a methodology to prevent malaria.

The productive component supports the organization of groups interested in improving their income-generation skills and activities, organizational and administrative capacities, and has included the establishment of revolving funds and activities aimed at improving the quality of work and the marketing of products. The socio-cultural component is aimed at fostering the organization of activities designed to strengthen the cultural identity of participants, especially by recovering and reviewing important aspects of past history and culture. Part of this component includes the creation of groups whose objectives are to organize and become involved in different cultural activities such as drama and music, local or folklore games, the study of indigenous myths, legends and medical practices.

Seven particular management features have had an important impact on the success of the programme and deserve to be highlighted:

a. The families represented, especially by the mothers, have been involved from the beginning in all the dimensions of the programme: planning, implementation and evaluation. Their participation has been centered on creating healthier physical and psychological environments for their children at both family and community level;

b. Community leaders, many of them mothers, have been the main educational agents in the programme;

c. The external agent, CINDE's staff, has not been directly involved with the community, but, rather, their role has been to train the community leaders, to serve as facilitators in the development process, and to act as a link with other institutions;

d. Emphasis, from the outset, on inter-institutional and inter-sectorial co-ordination and complementarity at the local and regional level has contributed a great deal to the success of the programme;

e. Despite the impoverishment of the area in which the programme is located, attention has primarily been directed (especially over the

first ten years) towards educational and organizational processes;

f. The priorities and specific activities in each community were, and continue to be, defined by the communities themselves based on the identification and analysis of their own and their children's problems and needs;

g. Most of the project activities started outside the school or other formal systems and have been gradually absorbed by the system in their innovative form.

Evolution of the project

The project has evolved in many ways:

- From a process started with 100 families in four communities of the Pacific coast of Chocó in two *"municipios"* (towns), the project now reaches 38 communities in seven *"municipios"* and 11,500 families in the whole state (7,000 participating in the development processes and 4,500 others participating and benefiting from the malaria prevention project).
- From working mainly with mothers interested in the healthy physical and psycho-social development of their children, the project has grown into an integrated development project involving all members of the community in health, educational, cultural, housing and productive activities.
- From a project basically initiated from the non-formal sector, the programme is, today, articulated around formal health, housing and an educational system composed of basic education and higher education.
- From an informal organizational base integrated mainly by mothers with children up to six years of age, the programme has, today, a broad community organizational base (PROMESA) and an autonomous local NGO, CIDEAL, (Centre for Research and Local Sustainable Development) with the technical capacity to administer all the dimensions of the programme.
- From being financed by components and activitites on a short-term basis, the project has grown into a programme financed on a medium-term integral basis.
- From a project with training programmes for community leaders only, there is, today, a flexible learning programme using diverse educational strategies for people at all levels using distance education with radio, radiophones, study groups and self-learning strategies in addition to seminars and workshops.

Achievements and evidence of effectiveness of the programme

There is clear evidence in many forms of the effectiveness of the programme on the whole environment. The impact can be evaluated by target groups:

Children

The mortality rate in the first five years has decreased from 110 to 76 per thousand. There has also been an appreciable reduction in child morbidity. Elementary school children are staying longer in school. Results from a longitudinal study show that, in 1980, only 17 per cent of 12-year-old children reached fifth grade but that 51 per cent of them did so nine years later. Elementary school children were achieving better results in mathematics, language and logical thinking than their 1980 peers. In conclusion, children are participating towards the development of their own communities in a dynamic way, mainly through child-to-child and youth-to-child programmes and are making more productive use of their free time.

Families and communities

There is a wide group of promoters composed of community personnel and about 220 volunteers, and community-based organizations guiding the different project activities. PROMESA, the community organization, started with groups of families organized at neighbourhood level and they have now reached municipal and regional level. The mothers show a healthier self-confidence and have an improved opinion of themselves. They have better relationships with their husbands and the communities value older people more. There has been a clear integration of the Indian and African-origin populations in the programmes. The parents and community play a very important role as educators of their children and in the improving of the physical environment through construction of latrines, reforestation, malaria and cholera prevention programmes. About 4,100 latrines have been installed by the communities and people have learned to maintain them adequately. The houses are now built in a more hygienic way and many of them have undergone improvements such as the separation of the different living spaces, better quality materials and construction away from stagnant water. There is a network of 34 microscopes in the more isolated communities which is used by community health workers to diagnose and treat malaria. There have not been any declared deaths or cases of hospitalization due to malaraia since 1992 and the cases of the disease have decreased greatly in the last years. There is a network of radiophones, six of them in Indian villages, to support communication, training and problem-solving. The communities are more self-confident and have more ability to work at the indivual and collective level to solve problems related to their children. Communities and families value educational opportunities more than before and see what their environment can offer. They have learnt to mobilize resources to develop new opportunities.

Teachers and schools

There is currently a programme to strenghten *"Escuela Nueva"*, the nationwide innovative project for schools in Columbia. The teachers from the different communities have developed curricula and materials to prevent malaria and cholera and are developing a child-to-child programme for dental health and a "learning how to think" programme. Some schools have organized pedagogical teams made up of teachers and parents to strenghten the quality of education and the school community relationship. The teachers have developed partnerships with the project promoters to strenghten children's learning opportunities. The infrastructures and facilities of many schools have been renovated and many community and school libraries have been organized.

In institutions

The interaction among different institutions and the articulation of actions to improve the conditions of young children have been strenghtened and mechanisms to evaluate and follow up have been devised. CIDEAL, the local NGO working on PROMESA, is made up of people from the region, it has assumed CINDE's functions and is developing actions with the community organization. There are about 140 professionals, working in the different institutions of the social sector who have graduated from CINDE's graduate programmes on Education, Social Development and Social Project Planning and Implementation. Many innovations related to the integral development of children are taking place in cooperation with national, regional and local governments.

3. Children's House in cyberspace http://childhouse.uio.no

Mission Statement for Children's House

Children's House is an interactive resource centre and meeting-place on the internet for professionals involved in issues related to the well-being of children. It serves for the exchange of information and is dedicated to supporting the generation and dissemination of knowledge about children's issues. Children's House facilitates the translation of the benefits of research and programming into policy and practice.

The Children's House was begun by Childwatch International Research Network in response to the urgent need to establish an electronic meeting-place on the internet for individuals and organizations involved in children's issues. In a rapidly growing cyberspace, it seemed important to ensure that children's issues were visible and available. It was envisaged that a shared internet site could offer a range of easily accessible on-line services, provide a kind of billboard for relevant events and bring several key partners together around awareness-raising and information on children's well-being. Accordingly, the Children's House, http://childhouse.uio.no, provides reliable information for ongoing activities within research, programming activities, international events, electronic conferences and databases. The Children's House is also an instrument for dialogue and discussion on the situation of children with a high degree of interactivity with links to further sites and e-mail contacts.

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The Children's House can be found and visited easily. The system of floors within the house, apart from reminding one of a child's drawing, allows for quick and clear navigation between subjects and needs. The visitor can obtain information rapidly and reach the relevant floor and theme without having to go through the whole site. Each floor is moderated by a different organization, reflecting the alliance of NGOs and associations around Early Childhood Development, and is regularly updated. The visitors tend to be researchers on children's issues, journalists, planners, NGOs, etc. but members of the general public are known to visit the site regularly. The architecture of the site, with its distinct floors, can be described as follows:

- the Early Childhood floor (General philosophy and information on the importance of the first few critical years of life)

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- the NGO floor (Moderated by Radda Barnen (Save the Children, Norway), this floor lists some of the NGOs involved with children issues)
- the Child Health floor (List of resources on children and health with specific data such as "fact sheets" for families or links to child health networks and organizations. This floor is monitored by the World Health Organization)
- the Child Research floor (Links to research results and institutions involved in child research worldwide. Particularly, links to the Childwatch on-line Database of 200 European Research Institutions involved in child research)
- the Children's Rights floor (Monitored by the Child Rights Information Network, CRIN, this floor offers a series of links to other sites with information on child rights issues. It also contains an electronic version of the DCI kit on international standards for the rights of the child)
- the Learning floor (Houses a variety of relevant internet resources on children, learning and educational opportunities)
- the Conferences floor (Moderated by the European Forum for Child Welfare, this lists conferences related to child issues and documents past meetings. One can register one's own conference or meeting on this floor. It is also possible to create a workshop for oneself, naming a moderator and interacting with partners on specific themes essential to children)
- the Training floor (Information on training courses related to children's issues. The floor is also interactive which means that organizations, universities and institutions are encouraged to register here)
- the Information Resources floor (A listing of relevant web resources on the situation of children around the world. It is divided into sub-floors or departments: General, Advocacy and Policy, Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention, Child Health, Children and Cities, Children and War, Children's Rights, Early Childhood, Homeless Children and Street Children, Youth and Adolescents, Journals with Relevance to Children, Internet Resources for Children).
- the News floor (Updates about the site)

The site does not compete with already existing home pages. On the contrary, one of its functions is to facilitate access to other useful websites in order to provide information to all those involved or interested in the well-being of children. In addition to being a common-entry point for serious activities, concerns and databases on child-related issues, it is also a common virtual meeting-point. Visitors can easily announce their own child-related subject interactively and at no cost. The training floor provides similar information on international training courses and the possibility of registering and opening up one's own activities in favour of children. This means, for example, that one can open a workshop on a child-related topic to receive inputs from interested parties and dialogue with partners in the field. To create a workshop,

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one has to fill in a form on the web and invite individuals or teams of professionals to join in a restricted group regulated by a password defined by the workshop initiator. To guarantee quality and ensure a degree of control, the workshop has first to be accepted by the general moderator who works on the site. It is this person who gives the initiator an e-mail with detailed instructions on how to moderate the workshop from his or her own computer. With the possibilities of interactivity that the internet offers today, and all the new opportunities that it will no doubt offer tomorrow, this system of virtual meetings will, one hopes, carry on growing as a forum for debate, communication, overviews and information-sharing to the benefit of children's issues.

To launch the site, Childwatch invited several important organizations and bodies involved in children's issues to cooperate on the Children's House project, believing that the only way to make such a project successful was to develop, monitor and promote the professional field in unison. Today, these organizations and institutions form the task force for the project - the steering Committee of the Children's House.

What makes the Children's House more than an ordinary website for gathering information, is the focus on interactivity. In a simple and user-friendly way, the Children's House guides the user towards interactive opportunities and key information. It is a concentration of vital issues for Early Childhood Development and a symbol of the effective alliance fighting for the rights of children worldwide.

4. Provision for Children with Disabilities in the Kindergarten Sector

Lao People's Democratic Republic

The emergence of special needs education in the Lao People's Democratic Republic is a relatively recent phenomenon. The process began, in 1992, with the opening of a small school for children with sensory impairments as a joint venture between the Lao Ministry of Education and the National Centre for Medical Rehabilitation. Since then, the process of change has continued growing with primary schools and kindergartens opening their doors to children with special needs.

These changes have taken place within the context of increasing awareness worldwide that early intervention can be particularly beneficial for children with special needs. Research, indeed, shows that ECD can moderate social differences, provide greater physical and intellectual stimulation for children with difficulties and mean less distress and more support for parents to overcome practical obstacles. Furthermore, ECD is a perfect entry point for acting with children with difficulties. It is the period in their lives when they are the most receptive, when particular attention can be given to their individual needs (when, for example, a particular learning difficulty can be addressed) and when an all-round holistic emphasis on the development of the child can bring concrete results. ECD is also an opportunity for families to become more involved in developing their child's potential by reaching an understanding of children's difficulties and the roles they need to adopt in facing them.

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The current Lao programme for inclusive schooling is interesting because it shows how the twin goals of improving quality in basic education and providing for children with special needs can be met together, with each other and because of each other. The overall programme for inclusive schooling began in 1989 when the Lao Government searched for partners for their school improvement campaign. Partnership with Save the Children Fund UK was particularly sought and an initial collaboration gradually led to the development of pre- and in-service teacher-training programmes in both pre-school and primary education, the introduction of more learner-centred teaching methods and a country-wide innovative inclusion programme for children with special needs.

The Lao Government had three main objectives in mind as it developed its programme for the progressive inclusion of children with special needs:

1) School improvement (as a result of inclusive schooling or as an opportunity to integrate education and thereby improve it. How best to promote learning within the school setting? What and how to teach? What should teacher trainees learn and how can they learn it?)

2) Education for All (by giving a chance to everyone to have access to basic education)

3) Early intervention (by providing the opportunity for intervention at an early age and thereby creating favourable conditions for the learning of children both with and without special needs)

These aims naturally required a variety of strategies to facilitate progress. These can be summed up as the following:

- the adoption of more learner-centred and active teaching methods
- training for those working with children with special needs
- the use of home-made visual learning aids and toys
- greater involvement of children in all activities in and around schools
- greater interaction in the classroom
- wider choice of activities
- more and better planning and documenting of processes and developments
- ongoing assessment
- a new attitude in which children's differences are acknowledged and teachers take responsibility for the learning going on in the classroom.

The new strategies and the overall drive for improvement, however, only truly began to have an effect on children with special needs when teachers assimilated and understood the aims outlined by the Government and Save the Children. The emphasis for teachers was on both learning through practice and child psychology. Teachers came to a greater comprehension of children's psychology, seeing how to deal with the differences and difficulties in each child. They were also able to develop their knowledge, concepts and practical activities within their classrooms by working daily with children. Because of the emphasis on learning through doing, methodologies changed relatively fast, moving away from the teacher as the centre of the class towards the children themselves. Teachers were willing to accept changes in classroom methodologies because of their new understanding of child development (physical, mental, emotional and social) and their appreciation of what "special needs" meant. They began to realise that each child's participation, regardless of his or her difficulties, was a necessity, not just a recommendation.

The general philosophy of "learning through play" was used to motivate teachers to change classroom management and facilitate inclusion and improvement. Teachers today, indeed, use and display a variety of methods and aids to stimulate this philosophy; for example, decorating the classroom according to each teaching topic, organizing play activities. During play-times teachers take the lead and then allow children to take over freely both indoors and outdoors. Children are encouraged to use their senses: touching, smelling, exploring, sensing and feeling. Children are organized in groups, with teachers making learning aids out of recycled elements. Use of local oral culture and the highest involvement of children is sought at all times.

The main instrument for implementing and spreading the improvement programme has been a "demonstration kindergarten" attached to the teacher-training institute. This allows for pre-service training and the opportunity for students to develop their practical skills. It enables an experimental classroom situation to be created for new teachers to try their hand at dealing with children in a group context.

Implementation of the programme has been carried out with relatively low budgets. Costs have included study tours and visits for Ministry of Education administrators and teacher trainers, access to written materials and research, the funding of an external adviser, funding the production of new study materials, and funding short in-service training courses. All measures have been carefully suited to the Lao culture, context and needs. It is interesting to note that, thanks to the improvement programme, a group of educationalists capable of devising, planning and implementing change has now developed. This same group is currently instrumental in developing further projects, especially in the field of rural family support.

An exploratory pilot project, as well as the "demonstration kindergarten" was also set up within the framework of the inclusion and improvement programme. It is aimed at children who have been failing in school and whose learning problems are at last being recognized. This pilot project has reached many conclusions: for example, that children with special needs can be included with active and flexible methods, that inclusion can actually speed up and refine school improvement, that assessment is necessary and that both teachers and schools need time to adapt and develop skills. Four main obstacle areas appeared, however, and they have contributed to a better understanding of how both integration and improvement work. These obstacles can be summed up as:

a) the recruitment of older children, over the age of ten, whose long-term exclusion renders them difficult to manage

b) the recruitment of children with severe learning difficulties which overburden the teachers

c) over-recruitment of children, so that some classes have over two children with special needs

d) use of old curricula, still ill-adapted to the context of integration and inclusive schooling.

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With the programme for improvement and inclusion now firmly anchored in the educational landscape, the problem now will be to cope with the demand for expansion and the new duties being required of teachers.

Taken from "First Steps. Stories on Inclusion in Early Childhood Education. Experiences in Provision for Children with Disabilities using the Kindergarten Sector", *UNESCO, Paris.*

5. Education for All:

A Programme for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities and other Special Needs into Early Childhood Development Programmes

South Africa

In the Central Region of the Province of the Eastern Cape in the Republic of South Africa, there is scant support for families or children with special needs. When disabilities are identified at birth by nurses or, later still, by parents, families are not necessarily given the information they need or desire. Services within the state are minimal and often understaffed, with a sore lack of equipment and resources. In the larger urban areas, such as Johannesburg or Cape Town, there are sophisticated services available for the more affluent families but, in the smaller towns or rural areas, programmes are still far out of the reach of poor families.

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South Africa

Early Childhood Development (ECD) in South Africa is still recovering from the country's past political system and continues to mirror many of the inequalities in society. According to the Interim policy on Early Childhood Development (1996), the ECD situation which South Africa has inherited, and is currently grappling with, is the consequence of severe neglect of the needs of young children. In 1996, it was estimated that only between 9 and 11 per cent of all South African children had access to ECD and this with a distinct bias in favour of urban white children. Rural black children remain the most disadvantaged. The problem, however, is not simply one of provision and expansion, it is also a question of poor quality. Few infants are catered for and even the education they receive is not always appropriate. This is obviously all the more critical for children with special educational needs who either receive an ill-adapted education or are excluded altogether.

In the absence of services to meet the many needs of children in the Province of the Eastern Cape, several NGOs and government-subsidised agencies have come together. One example of how these partnerships are filling in and providing concrete services is the Community and Child Development Centre (CCDC) in East London. This is a non-governmental organization which aims to assist in delivering quality education to all children and use its work as a vector to develop communities. The organization has the aim of spreading

"an awareness of the needs of children with disabilities and promotes their integration into society, particularly through mainstream education". CCDC relies on several basic steps which, it believes, are essential to achieve the aim of integration. They can be summed up as follows:

- staff need to commit themselves to examining their own attitudes towards, and stereotypes of, people with disabilities. This, in turn, influences the curriculum so that discussion of attitudes can be included at all levels of training;
- trainers need to attend workshops on disability issues;
- buildings should be made more accessible to wheelchair users and others with disabilities.

To help set themselves a clear agenda, CCDC carried out a series of surveys. These revealed that negative attitudes surrounding disability are prevalent in communities. These attitudes mean that many parents are reluctant to bring children with disabilities to the local ECD centres for fear of ridicule, rejection and distress. Parents also have detrimental attitudes towards their own children's disabilities. Furthermore, lack of training on disability issues was discovered to be a clear factor in preventing ECD practitioners from accommodating children with special needs. The fact that most ECD centres are under-resourced and not recognized or supported by government also makes inclusion difficult and often limited in quality. On the strength of its surveys, CCDC built up a programme for inclusion, basing its success strongly on the openness of their own staff. CCDC's programme now has four components which operate together to create a holistic approach to the inclusion of children with learning difficulties and special needs. These four key elements are:

- children with special educational needs learn with other children in a school attached to CCDC;
- staff working with children with special educational needs are specifically trained
- CCDC participates in policy development around ECD and special needs at both national and provincial level
- parents of children with special needs are empowered through specific programmes

CCDC's experience and fight for inclusion has provided many rich lessons:

- **Attitudes.** First and foremost, inclusion is about attitudes. Inclusion begins with parents. Parents who accept and love their child, and who are prepared to allow the child to develop his or her own sense of worth and identity, will provide the necessary support for what is often a difficult and demanding process in the mainstream sector. For inclusion to become a reality, both parents and practioners need

to expect that children will achieve their potential. Successful inclusion can and does occur in poverty-stricken environments when teachers, with little formal training, understand the potential within a child, and seek to release it.

- **The curriculum.** CCDC remains opposed to cosmetic inclusion where the child with special needs is placed in a mainstream classroom as a token gesture. Within a rigid curriculum, this is often the case. There must be room within the curriculum for different ability levels and individual goals. CCDC hopes that, by moving towards an outcomes-based approach in education in South Africa, there will be more room for curricular innovations which will benefit not only learners with special needs but all learners.

- **Support of the organization.** Probably the greatest strength at CCDC has been the support of the whole organization for inclusion. While it is only one project of the centre, the organization, as a whole, is fully supportive of the approach. Staff are fortunate in that they do not have to fight to make themselves heard, because inclusion has become an attitude that the entire organization prides itself on.

- **A holistic approach.** CCDC has managed to have a far-reaching impact from small beginnings. This is because it has adopted a holistic approach. CCDC realized that is not enough just to train teachers or to work on research and policy development. To have a real impact, all components of a project need to work in a complementary fashion, just as all aspects of the children need to be stimulated.

- **Parent participation.** CCDC has developed parental participation and involvement by allowing parents to decide what they want for their child by presenting them with alternatives and helping them work out what is best. In a trans-national education system which is not prepared for children with learning difficulties, parents need to be committed to the path they have taken, and they need intensive support from other parents and professionals.

CCDC's experience is a valuable example of overcoming inequalities and creating a new mindset to combat attitudes and prejudice, an experience which is all the more valid given the past political system built on inequality in South Africa. Through its school, the CCDC has proved that inclusion is possible, and that involving parents and communities is the surest way to achieve a change in attitudes and create a successful basis for developing the child's fullest potential.

Taken from "First Steps. Stories on Inclusion in Early Childhood Education". *Education for All: a programme for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities and other Special Educational Needs into Early Childhood Development Programmes, by Judy McKenzie.*

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6. Focus on Children (Blueprint for Action)

Ireland

Focus on Children was set up in 1992 by 24 voluntary organizations concerned with children's well-being; 12 from Northern Ireland and 12 from the Republic of Ireland. This alliance of organizations working towards the improvement of children's conditions on the island has been particularly effective in bringing children's issues to the fore. The main tool for awareness-raising has been the publication of a national blueprint for action. Following is a brief overview of some of the main recommendations of this blueprint which was published in 1994. It should be noted that both parts of Ireland have some of the youngest populations in Europe.

Children and families in a changing world

Recommendations: Parents and society have a duty to meet the needs of children. These various needs should be met, wherever possible, within the family unit. Children have a right to be parented by their natural parents where it is in their best interests and where parents are able to fulfill their child's needs. Support should be available, irrespective of the nature of the family unit in which children are living: parents who might appear to others to possess insurmountable difficulties should be given every opportunity to care for their children. Families with special needs should not be deprived of the opportunity to provide a family for children as a result of inadequate support systems or societal attitudes. The Governments of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland should sponsor a range of studies to provide a fuller understanding of children's experiences and needs within particular types of families. The State should recognize in law the family in all its diverse forms so as to ensure the rights of children to be protected, supported and parented in their family or extended family of origin, where feasible. It is no longer acceptable that the definition of the "family" be based solely on marriage. Mediation service should be required by law to ensure that children are considered, supported and protected in situations of family break-down.

Universal needs, material security

Recommendations: The "right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development" (Article 27) is still not being met everywhere. A number of children are members of households that are living in poverty and experiencing deprivation. Poverty, unemployment, bad housing and restricted services deprive children of their right to develop to their full potential. Research into the impact of direct deductions to benefits or earnings from families with dependent children should be undertaken as a matter of urgency. The concept of social solidarity should be developed in relation to the social protection systems in both the Republic and Northern Ireland. It is essential to develop a strategy for social protection of those most in need. Adequate legislation should be in place to provide appropriate protection to young people who are in employment, whether casual, part-time or full-time, with monitoring arrangements to ensure the effectiveness of such legislation.

Housing

Recommendations: There is an urgent need for services at community level in areas where there is a high incidence of homelessness among children and young people. These services should include drop-in centres, youth clubs, day activity centres and training provision. The accommodation of homeless children and young people in unsuitable facilities must stop as a matter of urgency. There is a need for more intensive work on the placement of children in care and further preparation of children for the outside world is required in after-care to ensure successful integration into society.

Health

Recommendations: To fulfil the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the area of health, the Governments of both parts of Ireland will need to continue their efforts. They will need to go into partnerships with the voluntary sector to improve the provision of health services for children. A range of studies should be undertaken to provide qualitative data in such areas as the psycho-social needs of ill children and the impact on family life of long-term caring for a sick child. Initiatives must be devised, resourced and implemented to tackle the impact of poor socio-economic conditions on access to existing health services. The pre-school and school-based monitoring of children's health needs to be revitalized and improved. Coherent policies on breast-feeding should be devised, and stays in hospital after birth must be sufficient for the establishment of breast-feeding, especially for first-time mothers. This needs to be supplemented by the provision of facilities in the community and in the workplace to allow mothers to continue breast-feeding over a longer period. Health education and its promotion for children must be tackled. Programmes should be addressed to parents, and delivered through

community-based agencies and appropriate health professionals. Programmes addressed to children should be delivered in appropriate and child-focused ways as an integral part of their everyday school curriculum.

Education

Recommendations: There is an urgent need for research to be conducted into the extent of non-attendance at school in both jurisdictions. The characteristics of non-attending children need to be analysed; as to the reasons why and how the current educational system is failing them. Every child should have access to an education which equips him or her for life and work and each child's educational rights and entitlements should be specified in law. This should entail that each child has access to high-quality schooling which is not dependent on his or her parent's ability to contribute. Pre-schools in the Republic of Ireland should be registered by the Department of Education and inspected on a regular basis by appropriately trained staff. If, as stated, the necessary support services must be provided to schools, the early identification of pupils with special needs is essential. A child has a right of access to a full range of support services in order to take full advantage of opportunities within the education system and to develop his or her potential to its fullest. Children's rights and entitlements to the curriculum should be statutory and include all children irrespective of their intellectual or physical ability. Pre-primary education should be recognized as a distinct stage of education and as a part of the continuum of education. A child has the right to have his or her special needs met and this within the mainstream educational system. Schools must become inclusive communities which focus on the needs of all children. In the context of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, this means a child should also have a right to be educated either in Irish or English together with a right to educational experiences which enhance his or her cultural identity, including the development of language.

Special needs

Recommendations: The civil liberties of children and young people with disabilities should be enshrined in law, and such legislation should be supported with appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and advocacy. There should be a uniform set of standards of care for organizations with children with disabilities in their care (including children in special residential schools). Information should be available for parents on the educational options for their child. Adequate financial support must be made available to both the families of children with disabilities, and to young people with disabilities themselves. There is a need for increased inter-agency co-operation in the provision of services for families with children who have disabilities. Standardized and consistent delivery of services to children with disabilites should be aimed at throughout the whole of Ireland. There is a need for a change in general perspective, no longer viewing the disabled child as an object of charity but as a child, the disability simply being a part of the child's experience.

Child protection

Recommendations: There should be standardized child protection to allow for cross-reference and co-operation between health boards and social service boards as a way of developing statistics on child protection. There is a need to develop an innovative strategy of public education in order to make child protection the concern of every citizen. Development of intervention programmes based on knowledge, values and skills reflecting the growing understanding of child protection work in its various forms and phases must be established as a priority. These programmes are needed to ensure identification and prevention of abuse. They are also necessary as pro-active intervention - providing remedial care for abused children and support for parents under stress and with parenting skill deficits.

Care

Recommendations: A more child-oriented system of care should be established in both jurisdictions. Children who have to enter substitute care should be protected and cared for in the most appropriate manner, have the resources and skills necessary for full maturation and be protected from all forms of abuse. The development of systems through which children themselves may be able to have input into their own "care careers" is necessary. Residential units for children and young people should be located as far as possible in the communities of origin of the client group. There is a need for greater clarity concerning the roles of parents and other carers in relation to children in either foster-care or residential care.

Justice

Recommendations: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes that the aim of the child penal justice code is the entitlement of children to be treated in a manner consistent with "The child's age and the desirability of promoting the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society". This blueprint takes this as its broad objective in terms of justice too. It is important to recognize that the causes of juvenile crime are multi-factorial and, thus, responses must be developed in a holistic, integrated and comprehensive manner both at local and Government level. There should be adequate funding and support for preventive measures. Community-based supervision should be encouraged and funded.

Cultural variation

Recommendations: Underpinning the development and provision of services to the children of minority communities in Ireland is the need to raise awareness about both their existence and their special requirements. Anti-

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discrimination legislation must be introduced. There should be an urgent review of both educational systems to ensure the development of an inter-cultural and anti-racist approach throughout the overall educational service. Inter-cultural materials should be available for both educational and recreational purposes. Linguistically and culturally appropriate facilities and instruments for assessing and identifying children with special learning needs should be available.

Conclusion

The Focus on Children initiative demonstrates the capacity of voluntary sectors to contribute to future planning of policy and provision for children. Fundamental to any planning or service delivery process for children, however, must be the commitment to enable children and their families to express their views, and the openness to incorporate these views in future provision. Focus on Children, with this blueprint, has done its best to raise the political profile of children. This work represents a unique partnership in the interests of children on an all-Ireland basis. It is a way of turning the rhetoric of the UN Convention into reality.

Taken from "Focus on Children. Blueprint for action", *by Avila Kilmurray and Valerie Richardson.*

7. Parent Schools

China

The six "liberations" of Chinese children

Traditionally in China, it is recognized that children must be set free in six respects. Their minds should be liberated, so that they can think in a lively way and engage in innovative and creative thinking. Their eyes should be taught to read and observe in order to widen their perspective. They should remove the plugs from their ears and listen to the songs of insects and birds in their natural surroundings, to fine music and to moving tales. Their mouths should become unmuffled, and they should be given more opportunity to express themselves through reciting, storytelling, participating in intellectual games, competitions and public speaking. Their hands should be unbound to enable them to do physical work and acquire skills in preparation for the future. Last but not least, their legs should be unshackled, to allow them to go into nature and society, to interact with people and make acquaintances. It is through these six "liberations" that they will acquire courage to engage in all sorts of social practice and build up their abilities.

China's Parent Schools began in the early 1980s. Although China has a long and rich history of education and family values, it was felt that new structures for family education were needed to face the many rapid changes undergoing society. Many traditional child-rearing methods are still at play within families but the gap between these practices and the requirements of modern family education called for some form of parent or family education programme. The task in China is, indeed, vast — the country has three hundred million families with six hundred million parents. If one rightfully considers parents as their children's first educators, this is one of the largest armies of teachers in the world. It is within this framework that the Parent Schools operate, educating the first educators.

The Parent Schools have many aims:

a) To help parents understand family life, its roles, its functions and obligations within the greater social context. To allow parents to understand the development of the child's intellect and the various stages of growth and care. To create stronger links between the home and the school and the community at large.

b) To assist parents in understanding their role as the child's first educators. They are the child's first models for socialization and communication, and fashion attitudes towards learning and the role to play in society.

c) To promote the family as a way of building a fuller and more equitable social development.

d) To help understand the role of women in promoting family education, equal rights for women and equal participation in society.

e) To nurture characteristics and abilities that help children to adapt to ever-changing environments, activate their thinking processes, deepen and widen their basic knowledge, expand their vision, and learn how to learn. To discover and foster new talents for the advancement of society, allowing children to continue the learning process all their lives.

f) To create an environment in which children can grow up confident and able to participate in society.

Parent Schools are the link between school, family and community. Their fundamental task is to improve the educational level and qualifications of parents and, through them, to promote the literacy and education of their children. The schools are a concrete attempt to contribute towards the reform of the whole school system, through the formulating of a co-operative model bringing together school, family and community education under the aegis of basic education.

Family education is a strong vehicle in the campaign for education for all in China. Today, there are 246,197 Parent Schools of all kinds across China, of which 223,137 are at county and district level, 21,007 at the provincial, prefectural and municipal level and 2,053 directly under the central authority. Four basic types of Parent School exist.

1) Parent Schools run by schools or departments. These function with a view to closely supplementing and co-ordinating school education. In these schools, parents are divided up according to the classes their children study in. Parents receive basic knowledge about pedagogy and psychology.

2) Parent Schools run by the community. These schools stress the importance of a strong home environment.

3) Parent Schools run by institutions for educational research. These schools run through courses offering lessons in the science of education to those perceived to be most in need.

4) Parent Schools run by social groups such as hospitals, which, for example, run pregnancy and childbirth schools for prospective parents and parenthood schools for parents with new-born babies. Other centres run programmes for parents with children with special needs. One could include TV and radio programmes for parents within this last group.

The manner in which lessons are dispensed in Parent Schools also varies from regular classes or lectures, consultations and the verbal exchange of experiences, to the use of radio and other media. Parent Schools have brought many benefits, from basic improvement in the links binding communities to schools, to a healthier development of children within the home. The Parent Schools are an interesting development in terms of Early Childhood Development as they emphasize the family as the basic construction block of society. They have raised general interest in the importance of the early years of life and their potential for changing society by instilling the desire to learn in children. The family itself has become the main instrument for change, as people have come to realize that they themselves hold the key to improvement in education. Parents have become more familiar with the aims and content of schools and children are more ready than before for schooling.

Problems have, of course, arisen in the development of Parent Schools. Some remote and isolated areas remain without Parent Schools because of uneven geographical distribution and distance and there is a lack of concerted supervision and general links between all the schools. Unequal quality in schools is another problem, because they depend all too often on the actual availability and openness of the parents participating. Improvements are still possible and many key aspects, such as the development of teaching materials, and increased international co-operation, will no doubt help the process.

Source: "An evaluation of Parent Schools in China", *by Ma Baolan and Guo Xiaoping, published by UNESCO, 1995.*

8. Indian Institute of Education, Pune Child Recreation Centres

India

Child Recreation Centres (CRCs) are a community-based innovation in early childhood education in India. They are an important aspect of the Indian Institute of Education's project PROPEL (Promoting Primary and Elementary Education). CRCs serve rural children in the three to six age-group. The assumption which underlies CRCs is that the child is a self-propelled, autonomous learner and that child development requires free expression of this autonomy.

In essence, PROPEL sees learning as a relaxing, pleasurable, recreational activity which should be suited to the needs and age of the child. The aim of CRCs is to provide young rural children with the necessary climate and opportunities for stress-free exploratory learning. The PROPEL project runs 30 CRCs in centrally located villages in the project area covering 137 contiguous villages (in majority in the state of Maharashtra).

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The CRCs postulate five dimensions in which children's personalities can grow so as to enable them to move with ease not simply into primary education but into the many facets of life it might encounter in youth and adulthood. First of all, the child has to be enabled to grow as a creative individual, not over-directed by adults. Spontaneous expression of the child's consciousness is to be encouraged. Singing, dancing, acting, drawing, sculpting, designing and other such free activities are favoured. Second, CRCs instil this same concept in the parents because it is they who can help their child feel that he or she belongs to the family and the family to him or her. The emotional bonds of the child and the family are thus strengthened. Third, the CRCs acquaint the child with its social world, i.e. its peer group, teachers, community members. This is done through group activities of a "joyous" nature. The principle that the development of the child as a social being takes place when it ceases to be afraid of others, is brought into play. When the child begins to take pleasure in being with others, it learns to seek help from others when physically or emotionally troubled. Fourth, the child's relationship with nature is considered to be an important aspect of its cognitive and attitudinal growth. Outdoor activities, observation and exploration are used as the means for stimulating the child's innate interest in environment. Its urge to love birds, animals, trees, flowers and everything that nature offers is encouraged. Fifth, the child's need to grow up as a future citizen is recognized. His or her consciousness of rights and responsibilities, and sensitivity to democratic processes, receive stimulus through participatory activities like gardening, organizing games, making things and so on.

A collaborative programme of parental and community orientation to child development is a special feature of the CRC design. Parents, in particular, are guided to analyze their viewpoints on child-development. They also discuss interpersonal relations within the family, since this has a strong impact on child-socialization. Women's status and empowerment are a major concern in these discussions. Since the attitudes of the male members of the family towards the female members, and vice-versa, determine the children's views on gender-relations and mould the personalities of boys and girls, the CRCs organize Women's Development Groups for the child's female relations. These are, in effect, empowerment groups which discuss women's legal and economic problems, husband-wife relationships, women's life-aspirations, family health and nutrition, women's reproductive health, and so on. Besides, parents are encouraged to visit the CRCs frequently. They participate in telling stories, teaching songs and games, and observing child behaviour. This helps them to understand how children learn and develop.

Field-workers of the PROPEL project invite villagers to study how a CRC is established, conducted and funded at the level of the community. It is explained to them that CRCs run by the PROPEL project are a form of sample or example. Villages should, then, be ready to take over activities as soon as PROPEL is convinced that they are prepared to manage them at the community level. They must do this mostly with community contribution in cash and kind. Thus, groups of village-leaders study CRC budgets, the equipment required, the manner of selecting instructors and providing continuity to this localized educational enterprise. PROPEL promises to conduct non-formal training of instructors. Its workers are also available for advice whenever the community needs it.

An evaluation has shown that of the 137 communities covered by the PROPEL project, 122 have now established their own pre-schools, more or less on the CRC model. The women members of these communities have been in the forefront for demanding provision of early childhood education. There has been much awakening not only about health and nutrition for the child but for the family as a whole. It has also been found that children who have attended CRCs, before enrolling in grade I of the local primary schools, consistently show much greater self-assurance, facility in language and stand out as superior in comparison with children who did not have the benefit of attending CRCs. Another benefit is that adolescent rural girls are demanding information and training in child health and child education.

As regards women's empowerment, the programme has yielded moderate results. But a demand for income-generating and health education programmes has arisen from women in the communities involved in early childhood education on the CRC model. The PROPEL project now conducts only one model CRC for guiding the community-managed centres. This is located at the Centre for Education and Development of Rural Women, conducted by the Indian Institute of Education at Shivapur village, 25 kms from Pune, and is accessible to all communities. The CRC experiment conducted as part of the PROPEL project is being emulated there.

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9. "Clos d'enfants":

Mobilization of women to create innovative early education structures

Mali

"I eat, then I play and sing and dance," says four-year-old Faye from Mali. Though she might not realize it, Faye, along with her playmates, their mothers and their grandmothers, is a pioneer in a new community-based child-care project.

Setting up "clos d'enfants" (children's learning groups)

The "clos d'enfants" were set up as part of the partnership between UNESCO and the "Fédération Internationale des Centres d'Entraînements aux Méthodes d'Education Active" (FICEMEA) to help support the development of young children in French-speaking Africa. This partnership with the FICEMEA was the first project launched under the guidance of the new Réseau Africain francophone Prime Enfance (Early Childhood Francophone African Network) which was created in September 1996 at a regional seminar in Burkina Faso. At this seminar and as a follow-up to its recommendations, UNESCO and the FICEMEA decided to support a project initiated by a women's association from Bamako (Mali). The Malian project selected seeks to create first one and then several "clos d'enfants" or children's learning groups in which children are supervised and taken care of by volunteer mothers. The "clos d'enfants" in Mali is currently in its pilot phase.

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What is a "clos d'enfants"?

The concept of the "clos d'enfants" has continued growing in methodology and organization since its beginning. It is based on traditional practices and employs the minimum equipment to care effectively for the good health and education of children aged three to six. The children are supervised and cared for by three volunteer mothers at a time, who take turns on a rotating basis every day of the week. They are part of a wider team of fifteen women (mothers, grandmothers, future mothers).

The "clos" are designed as an integral part of the activities of the women's association. They are aimed at the young children of a given neighbourhood or village, in particular those of disadvantaged or at-risk families for whom the "clos" tries to provide good health and nutrition and to foster positive learning attitudes. The "clos d'enfants" offer a specific social space (for 12 to 15 children) adapted to the age and activities of the children, allowing for learning in small age-groups (i.e. 3 children aged three) and initiatives requiring co-operation between people of different ages (taking care of the garden, etc.). Apart from the particular activities for the children, the "clos" also mobilize women from the neighbourhood or village to join in. The centre becomes an opportunity for training in areas of health, nutrition and learning.

Why create "clos d'enfants"?

In French-speaking African countries, only a few young children benefit from early childhood education and, within this group, young girls are generally in a minority. All early childhood institutions or kindergartens, when they exist, demand fees, even the rarer pre-school classes attached to primary schools. Governments in the region are, however, increasingly convinced about the need for a more generalized form of education before the start of primary school. Early childhood professionals, educators and administrators are already willing to mobilize themselves to undertake awareness-raising actions among parents and are ready to come up with innovative and low-cost solutions (to keep children away from the dangers of the street or domestic accidents, to improve child health, lower mortality rates, improve holistic development and encourage the care and education of very young girls). Low-cost programmes, "simple" in structure and close to the local populations are increasingly required, with even, in some cases, seasonal structures.

Actions towards young children pre-suppose actions with women. Women play crucial roles in rural areas and need to be helped at sowing times and during harvests. Similar needs are felt by women in cities, though in different aspects of work. Already, women are seeking and finding collective solutions for certain tasks (domestic chores, family or community occasions). Why would they not do the same to offer their young children structured spaces and educational situations, favourable to their growth and development? Caring for children is a privileged activity which borrows on existing skills, even if these have to be adapted, and meets a need which, generally, all mothers feel. The "clos d'enfants" are being actively supported as an opportunity for mothers, grandmothers and mothers-to-be to organize themselves better and use their organization as a means to rediscover traditional practices of child-raising and caring.

"Early childhood education is not just about carrying out this or that activity with children, such as puzzles or games; it is also about passing on our culture and values through storytelling or dance. That's how, for example, we learn that betrayal is a bad thing, that we must respect rules; in other words, how to behave in society." So speaks Oumou Diakité, organizer of the first

"clos d'enfants". She says she wanted to "recreate a family-like environment, with small groups," for young children who would otherwise be exposed to "the dangers of the street, the gutter and pollution".

Some simple and basic principles

The "clos d'enfants" are an innovative educational project but are based on simple principles that are rarely implemented in existing early childhood structures in Africa. Their simple principles were conceived clearly and succinctly from the start to prevent any deviations that would modify the nature of the project.

1) A "clos" brings together a small number of children: 15 or so. This number is adapted to the age of the children (three to six). It allows for the creation of sub-groups by age (for example, three children of three years of age). It also allows for a group identity, facilitating inter-age co-operation. This small number permits an equally small administrative infrastructure and little hierarchy between the "educator-mothers", and provides the chance to hook up with existing structures (school, social and community centre) of which some services will be used (drinking water, latrines, etc).

2) The children are supervised and cared for by volunteer mothers - the "educator-mothers": in the current pilot phase, 15 mothers, in teams of three a day, were chosen and trained to surpervise the "clos". Each is thus mobilized one day a week. Without denying the role of professionals or salaried personnel, it is important to stress that volunteer part-time commitment is required of the "educator-mothers" and is key in the "clos d'enfants" project. Through the education of young children, the "clos" seeks to encourage the education of mothers and the promotion of women in general. The administrative structure supporting the "clos" is, as mentioned, a women's association. The general responsibility for the running of the "clos" and the training of the mothers rest with a chosen organizer working on behalf of the women's association.

A supervisory group of three to four persons, external to the association, brings an outside vision to the project and serves as a liaison with the local or national autorities and the other agencies supporting the project. For example, the 14 "educator mothers" who went through the initial one-week training in January 1997, also met again in mid-February 1997 with the organizer of the "clos" when the trainers established a general plan and strategy. The plan was that three women (a young one, a grandmother and a mother) would set up and clean the "clos" each day. They would also prepare the snacks and the lunch, involving the children in these tasks. It is this team of three women which leads the activities of the day, that is from eight in the morning to two o'clock in the afternoon every

day except the weekend. It is agreed that if one of the three has a problem, she will ask another mother to replace her, and contact her directly. The four trainers ensure the follow-up of the initial training, the monitoring of the activities of the "clos" and organize a meeting with the educator-mothers every week. During these meetings, the trainers listen to the "educator-mothers" and pinpoint what seems to be going well or failing. The meetings are also an opportunity to provide additional training on certain specific issues or problems the educator-mothers come across.

3) The children and the mothers of each "clos" participate in growing a garden and raising chickens. Beside the income-generating aspect, these activities offer an important educational content which allow discussion and practical work on problems of adult life and the practice of co-operative and sustainable work.

4) In the "clos", the development of children is considered in its entirety: that is, responding to nutritional (the children receive a meal each day), hygiene, health, emotional, social and cognitive needs. This global view is first and foremost an attempt to meet an urgent need: to improve children's health through better hygiene habits and good nutrition. Mothers are trained in this respect and children learn certain basic practices. The "clos" also put an emphasis on preparing children to be able to take full advantage of elementary schooling when they reach the right age. Children are, therefore, offered a wide variety of activities to create an atmosphere that builds trust and favours exchange or socialization.

5) The pedagogy used in the "clos" is an interactive one.

– It is the child who builds his or her knowledge.

– The educational action is linked to the organization of an adapted and efficient living and learning environment.

These two principles govern the organizers of the "clos" and the trainers of the mothers.

In March 1997, the first "clos" or *"Den Ladamu So"* (which in Bambara language means "house of education for the child") opened in Niarela, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Bamako, Mali. In April 1998, a second *"Den Ladamu So"* opened in a rural area some 30 kms outside of Bamako. For the first six months, the "educator-mothers" carried out their practical training in the "clos" itself.

Although the *"Den Ladamu So"* in Niarela is a small community project, it has a lot at stake for Mali and, in the long run, for other African countries such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Guinea, Senegal, Togo, and other members of the French-speaking network "Réseau Africain Francophone Prime Enfance". The *"Den Ladamu So"* mark the beginning of a larger project designed to create

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similar children's groups all over French-speaking Africa and mobilize women for the education of young children.

Partners in the Mali project include the Malian Ministry of Basic Education, UNESCO, UNICEF and the FICEMEA. All parties are following the progress of the "clos" with interest, not least because they are an example of an attractive, low-cost model. The annual cost of running a "clos", including training, meals, basic health, evaluation and training, is less than 40,000 FF or US$7,200.

10. Arab Research Collective

Based in Cyprus, the Arab Research Collective (ARC) works as an interface between practitioners, academics, training institutions, regional programmes and local funding partners. It facilitates networking among ECCD programmes for the Arab Region and addresses such areas as community awareness and participation (specifically targeting parents), and the adoption of holistic and integrated approaches to programming and implementation for young children.

ARC attempts to put forward appropriate and collaborative development models. Its major concern is to protect and preserve the health of communities in the Arab Region by encouraging and enabling children and young people to play a responsible role in the health and development of themselves, their children, families and communities. ARC works on existing patterns for child-rearing and care and the traditional role of Arab children in looking after the needs of their younger brothers and sisters (implementing the Arab Child-to-Child Programme). ARC also promotes alternative approaches to education in the region by encouraging the incorporation of school health programmes into national curricula to integrate early childhood development by linking health, education and nutrition.

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All too often, Arab health and development workers feel isolated or marginalized. They lack resources to work effectively at the local level and do not have much opportunity to share experiences with colleagues. This situation is particularly true in the field of ECD. For this reason, ARC organizes debates and activities around children's rights throughout the Arab world and encourages the creation of networks. Its philosophy of "collective" ownership is becoming well-established and its regional network extends wide with field-workers and policy-makers now representing many countries in the region.

ARC works according to well-established and direct objectives. The following are some of their current aims and challenges:

- to produce and disseminate relevant knowledge through written and audio-visual materials;
- to help in developing needed skills through training, particularly on the production and use of resources;
- to promote and practice networking among organizations and

workers at grassroots level and this through enhancing communications and exchange of information within the region by establishing a database and preparing situational analyses for a comprehensive framework to ECCD programming;

- to produce posters, audio-visual teaching aids (such as an Arabic version of a series of videos on Community Based Rehabilitation), educational games, a regional newsletter and similar resources (i.e: the development of an Arab/English glossary of ECCD terms);
- to facilitate co-operation and co-ordination among local and regional programmes and activities in education, training, research and publishing;
- to co-ordinate the holding of seminars and workshops with co-ordination of consultants and trainers to support local activities and training;
- to work towards establishing a regional resource centre to support local projects and resource centres;
- to pinpoint needs and appropriate materials, writing, adapting and translating, field testing at local level, revising, publishing and distributing (work in this respect concentrates on the production of Arabic books and training materials in the fields of primary health care, mother and child health, nutrition, disability and related areas of community development);
- to promote community awareness and participation, focusing on working with parents;
- to elaborate a conceptual framework that provides a "vision" for adopting a holistic and integrated approach to programming and implementation;
- to design a framework for the production of descriptive reports on the situation of early childhood in the countries where partners are active, with a view to building a strategy for the year 2000 and beyond.

To function, ARC relies on the individual and collective initiative of its trustees and members in all aspects of its mission. Trustees communicate with one another as often as their commitments allow them. They meet as a Board once a year and invite observers from among ARC's partners to take part in deliberations. A co-ordination team makes executive decisions and responds to emergencies. In matters of early childhood development, the Arab Resource Collective works essentially in partnership with Arab and international NGOs, and in cooperation with UN agencies and governmental structures. ARC acts under the guidance and with the direct involvement of a Regional Consultative Resource Group, and in collaboration with a team of field-workers and policy-makers from local NGOs in Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt and Morocco. ARC's ECD activities also involve partners in other Arab countries, such as Jordan, Yemen and Sudan. The ARC, especially with the Regional Consultative Resource Group, is currently trying to create cumulative processes which will lead to a "movement" of individuals and organizations committed to improving the methods and practices of Early Childhood Development in Arab societies.

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